

An Interview with Dr. Hongwei Hu, A Visiting Scholar at Huamin Research Center, Rutgers University

Zihui Gong, Huamin Research Center

Dr. Hongwei Hu was a Visiting Scholar at the Huamin Research Center, which is a part of the School of Social Work at Rutgers University, from August 2013 to July 2014. Dr. Hu is an associate professor and the director of Department of Social Security at the North China Electric Power University. He received his doctorate from the School of Social Security at WuHan University and was a post-doc at the Guanghua School of Management in Peking University.

The Huamin Research Center was established in May 2012, by the China Huamin Charity Foundation and Rutgers University. The mission of the Huamin Research Center is to develop and disseminate knowledge through research and exchanges that promote professional development of nonprofit organizations, and strengthens individual, family, and community well-being in China. Under the leadership of the Director of the Huamin Research Center, Dr. Chien-Chung Huang, the Center actively promotes the exchange of knowledge regarding nonprofit organizations and social work between China and the United States. Meanwhile, the Center aims to promote the development of nonprofit organizations and social work by publishing a series of research reports and brochures on social services and social welfare, and to nurture next-generation leaders on nonprofit organizations and social work in China

The following interview with Dr. Hongwei Hu depicts his time as a Visiting Scholar at the Huamin Research Center.

1. Why did you choose Rutgers University as your hosting institution?

It's all because of Dr. Chien-Chung Huang. With the deepening exchange between Rutgers and universities in China, Dr. Huang and the Huamin Research Center have established a widespread influence in China. I learned of the School of Social Work at Rutgers University at an International Conference held by Rutgers and Renmin University of China in 2011. I met with professors from Rutgers and admired their work, especially Dr. Huang. I had a conversation with Dr. Huang and found that the Rutgers School of Social Work has great achievements in social work practice and policy research, and so I began to think about coming to Rutgers as a visiting scholar.

2. Please describe your research before you came to Rutgers.

My research area is on social security, particularly for health and medical insurance issues. I have focused on health services for the elder in recent years and found that Rutgers has similar research projects. I then decided to come to Rutgers as a visiting scholar. Also, my research was in a bottleneck before I came to Rutgers, and I hoped I could come to Rutgers to learn from other scholars and break through the bottleneck. Furthermore, a faculty in China takes on many responsibilities besides their research. It made me overwhelmed and I did not have time to expand my knowledge there. I felt behind my colleagues in this area. I decided to be a visiting scholar abroad so that I could learn new theories and methods.

3. How has your research progressed, and what have you learned at Rutgers?

My research has advanced substantially. With the help of Dr. Huang, I cooperated with other faculty at Rutgers, which moved my research agenda forward. As for my learning, I am nervous as I realize I had so much to learn. There are many readings to work on every day, but I am glad to learn new things. Meanwhile, I attended activities hosted by the Huamin Research Center, such as the exchanges with scholars from China. This provided me with a new perspective that allows me to look into the problem outside of China's viewpoint. I learned a lot from these exchanges, including critical thinking, research methods, and attitudes. More importantly, I am very happy here. I work with several faculty members at Rutgers and have wonderful exchanges. I sit in the Policy Analysis course, and have learned tremendous knowledge from the faculty. I feel that the faculty at Rutgers is active in research and critical thinking. This is essential for a researcher and I think that faculty in China need to learn in this aspect.

4. Please describe your experience at the Huamin Research Center.

I feel happy, busy, active, and effective at the Huamin Research Center. Every staff member works with vigor and they participate in various projects. The productivity of the center is evidenced by the process of their project meetings. I feel that the Huamin Research Center is full of productivity, and has made great contributions to the quality and amount of research. The center hosts academic conferences and publishes research reports as well as books. It makes great contributions to the areas of social welfare and nonprofit management. The center is an important platform for exchange between China and the United States, as evidenced by the hosting of the annual conference of the American Association for Chinese Studies, and the exchanges with many universities in China, including: Tsinghua, Peking, Nankai, Renmin, and Beijing normal universities.

Two things stand out in the activities that I have participated in. One is the exchange between the Mental Health Research Institute of Peking University and a local mental health NGO in New Jersey. The exchange arranged by the Huamin Research Center gave staff at Peking University a comprehensive understanding of the American community treatment and care for mentally ill patients. I know that all visitors have learned a great deal from that visit. The second thing is that some American students participated in the China Study Abroad Program, hosted by the Huamin Research Center. These students developed an understanding of and compassion for the social problems in China. For example, after witnessing the poor condition of migrant-children schools in Beijing, two American students initiated a reading room project and have collected hundreds of books for the school in Beijing. Thus, the Huamin Research Center is not only a research center but also a bridge between China and the United States.

5. Could you please explain how the experience at the Huamin research center has affected you?

The experience has affected me a lot, especially in two areas. One is my enhanced understanding of how the research centers in China could function and operate, including upholding the center mission and conducting research teamwork. The Huamin Research Center is a good example to follow in these aspects. More importantly, I have learned a lot more about how to conduct a high-quality research. In this area, scholars in the United States are more advanced than researchers in China. They specify their research questions, which are often related to their daily life, then examine the questions with critical thinking and strict research

methods.

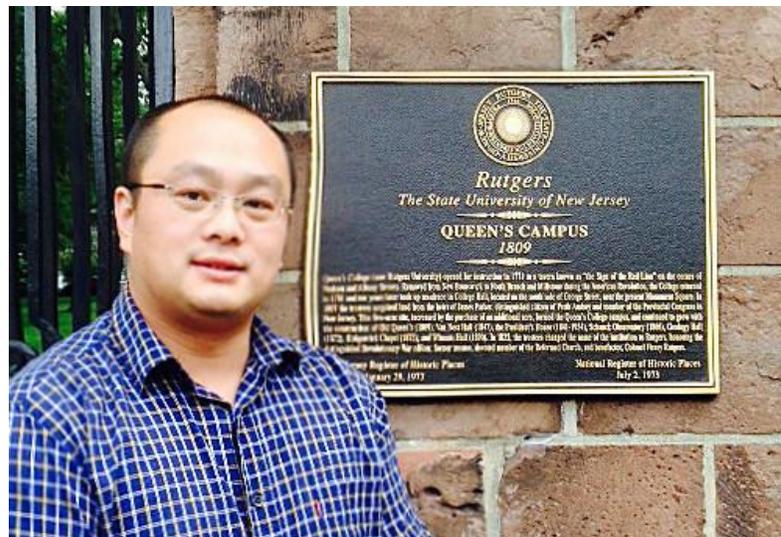
6. What is your plan after the visit at Rutgers?

In the future, I will apply what I learned from the Huamin Research Center to my own research, in order to produce high-quality research. I would also like to continue to participate in the activities of the Huamin Research Center, and to assist the Huamin Center with achieving their mission. I have learned a lot about child welfare and nonprofit management issues while at the Huamin Center. These two topics are very prominent issues in China as well. I will conduct research on these two topics and cooperate with scholars at Rutgers in the future. Moreover, I hope my Department of Social Work in China could learn from the education system in the United States, including: teaching methods, clinical training, and career services. The system at Rutgers University is an excellent example to us, and we can apply that to help our students advance in their professional career.

7. What is your expectation for the Huamin Research Center?

I hope that the Huamin Research Center can advance their research agenda and play an important role in promoting exchanges between China and the United States. I expect the Center to continue its visiting scholar program, particularly for young visiting scholars, whom are under age 40. The young scholars are hungry for new knowledge and eager to cooperate with foreign scholars in order to advance a common research agenda. The Center has many young scholars, including me, this year. We work and study together. All of us are active thinkers and have learned a lot new knowledge. This is an unforgettable experience for me, and I hope the experience will become true for other young scholars in China.

Translated by Fei Pei, MSW Intern, Huamin Research Center.



Dr. Hongwei Hu at Rutgers' Queen's Campus.



Dr. Hongwei Hu in the gate of Rutgers. The building behind him is President's office.



Dr. Chien-Chung Huang (on the left), Director of Huamin research center, and Dr. Hongwei Hu (on the right)



Dr. Hongwei Hu presented a paper at the 2013 AACSB annual conference



Dr. Hongwei Hu, Director Huang, and staff of the Huamin Research Center.