An Interview with Congcong Zhang,
A Visiting Scholar at Huamin Research Center, Rutgers University

Yuhan Wei, Huamin Research Center

Congcong Zhang was a Visiting Scholar at the Huamin Research Center in the School of Social Work at Rutgers University, from September 2017 to June 2018. Congcong Zhang is a doctoral student of the School of Social Development and Public Policy at Beijing Normal 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 strengthen 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 Congcong Zhang depicts her time as a Visiting Scholar at the Huamin Research Center.

1. Why did you choose Rutgers University as your hosting institution?
   I learned about Rutgers University and applied for a visit because of Professor Chien-Chung Huang. First of all, my research interest is non-profit organization, and Professor Huang's interest of research in recent years has also been non-profit organizations. Our similar professional interests made me want to work with Professor Huang. Second, Professor Huang has a comprehensive understanding of both Chinese and American nonprofit organizations, which gives him an advantage in the comparative study of Chinese and American charities; this topic is exactly what I want to study. A friend of mine met Professor Huang, and she introduced me to Professor Huang. After I talked to Professor Huang, I felt that he was very approachable, and the Center’s research concentrations and work atmosphere were phenomenal, so I applied be a Visiting Scholar at Rutgers University.

2. Please describe your research before you came to Rutgers.
   I am a doctoral student, specializing in public administration, at Beijing Normal University and my research interest is non-profit organization management. Before coming to the Huamin Research Center, I had contact with many nonprofit organizations in China and helped evaluate their projects. In terms of research methods, I have always been engaged in qualitative research methods, mainly using case studies. My research focuses are evaluation of nonprofit organizations and projects, environmental nonprofit organizations, some government procurement services, and the relationship between government and social organizations.

   Before I came here, I had just finished my dissertation proposal on strategic management of nonprofit organization, which explored the resources and methods that go into planning nonprofit organizations. The purposes of my visit to the Huamin
Research Center were to understand: 1) how American nonprofit organizations set up developmental strategies; 2) the differences and similarities between the nonprofit organizations and enterprises in the set-up of strategic planning; and 3) the current progress of research on nonprofit strategic management.

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

I am currently working on multiple research projects with Professor Huang. With Professor Huang's help, the research progress is relatively smooth. This semester we have completed one article, and three other articles are in process. We will present these articles in Hong Kong, Netherland, and Beijing. I've learned a lot from working with Professor Huang. I was able to improve and expand my research ability. For example, I had not done quantitative study before, but after coming to the Huamin Research Center, Professor Huang taught me how to do systematic quantitative research. I began to write articles in English and submitted them to SSCI journals, which is a substantial breakthrough for me. At the same time, with Professor Huang's help, I took management courses, and I got some inspiration from the classes for my dissertation.

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

First, let's talk about the experience of academic study. During the visiting period, I benefited a lot from working with Professor Huang. We met every week to talk about the progress of research and his thoughts. In the meetings, Professor Huang patiently answered all my questions and helped me revise my article to improve my research methods and English writing. In addition, I took two management courses that were related to my dissertation topic. I also attended some academic conferences and lectures to learn about latest research from international scholars in the nonprofit organizations field. The Huamin Research Center has provided a good research environment. Professor Huang has given me a lot of support. I really learned and gained a lot from this visiting experience. In terms of living experiences, Professor Huang and his team were very friendly and helped me adapt to life here. Everyone respects each other and helps each other. I think it is very comfortable to do research in this big group.

5. Could you share how the experience at the Huamin Research Center has affected you?

I want to talk about the impact of this visiting experience on my academic attitude. I think Professor Huang is very professional in his work, and his high expectation of me is a positive motivational source. In addition, the visiting experience also improved my scientific research ability. Overall, these nine months of visiting are very valuable to me. I am very lucky to come to the Huamin Research Center, and I’m glad that I had the opportunity to work here with Dr. Huang.

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

First of all, I will continue to work on several studies that have not yet been completed. Next, I will write my dissertation and prepare for graduation next year. During the visit, Professor Huang helped me broaden my vision, and I paid attention to other interesting topics such as charitable donations, policy research, etc. In the future, I will get involved in more research fields and try different research methods to study nonprofit organization in China and the United States. If “If the opportunity presents
itself, I look forward to working with Professor Huang again in the research of nonprofit organizations.

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

   The Huamin Research Center has given me a lot of help in life and academia during my visit. I have some suggestions based on my own experience. The Huamin Research Center recruits visiting scholars every year. Although their research interests may be different, I think communication between each other can broaden horizons, so I think the Huamin Research Center can hold academic salons regularly. Doctoral students, Master’s students, and visiting scholars can share their latest research. I think this kind of communication will also create opportunities for mutual understanding and cooperation among visiting scholars and students.

   In my 9 months of visiting, I learned a lot at the Huamin Research Center, widened my research interests, and improved my research ability. More importantly, this experience fostered my professional attitude. I sincerely wish that the Huamin Research Center will grow to be better and better, and I hope that more domestic scholars will come here to learn and communicate with others.
Congcong Zhang (left 2, line 2) at 2018 ARNOVA conference in Michigan

Congcong Zhang and Director Chien-Chung Huang at a Global Philanthropists Circle meeting in New York City
Congcong Zhang volunteered at Robert Wood Johnson Hospital for Chinese New Year celebration

Farewell Luncheon for Visiting Scholars