

## **Report on the Special Sessions**

### **The State of Research into Chinese Civil Society**

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Chinese civil society has always presented a complex puzzle to research but, fortunately for those involved in the cycle of publishing, its growth was relatively sedate. Recently however it has appeared increasingly dynamic, with some areas expanding rapidly, and significant new partnerships being established. At the same time its development in certain areas has also encountered some substantial hurdles, causing many who labeled the recent expansion a 'springtime' to question their choice of seasonal metaphor. These new developments present a puzzle to researchers and it was therefore important to give the subject the attention that it deserves at the Muenster Conference.

The Special Session took place on Thursday morning and was sponsored and coordinated by China Development Brief, a Chinese NGO with a long history of supporting grassroots NGOs in China and a strong relationship with the ISTR (see the previous newsletter). The Session aimed to explore the state of research into this vibrant sector by analyzing research settings and active projects, investigating the challenges faced by researchers, and taking a look at future research agendas.

I began the session by outlining recent developments in the sector. NGOs in China have for many years been a weak and marginalised group but recently this situation has appeared to change. Government attitudes, broadly speaking, are becoming more welcoming and society is certainly becoming more aware. As China develops, its civil society is becoming increasingly multifaceted, networked, mainstreamed, and international. This introduction hopefully set the scene for the focus of the Session: five Chinese researchers talking about their research experiences.

First up was Jie Chen of the University of Western Australia who spoke about his path-breaking research into transnational Chinese civil society, an area that is significantly understudied. Professor Chen also recounted his experience doing fieldwork, drawing attention to the many obstacles that still exist for researchers investigating sensitive areas. The next researcher to speak was Dr You Fei of the Beijing Municipal Social Development Office, whose research focused on the Chinese governments perspective on civil society growth, talking about where it fits into their 'harmonious' vision of state-society relations. Third was Yang Li of Beijing Normal University's China Academy of Social Management. Professor Yang focused on outlining the institutional environment of her research, drawing attention to the increasing interest and opportunities to research the sector, and the diversification of research topics. Then came Lili Wang of Arizona State University who gave a fascinating account of her significant experiences researching philanthropy and governance in China, focusing on her most recent work on the government contracting-out of services to domestic NGOs. This very recent development is an example of one of the many new avenues for research that have recently opened up. Last but not least came PhD student Ruoyun Hua of Tsinghua University's School of Public Policy and Management. Ruoyun gave an in-depth account of her research into measuring the transparency of Chinese foundations. Transparency and trust issues are important topics in Chinese civil society, and Ruoyun's research – done alongside renowned expert Professor Deng Guosheng – exposed the unsatisfactory reliability and validity of existing measures of transparency.

These five accounts opened a small but vivid window into the diverse research currently being done into this dynamic and complex sector. They showed that emerging trends and new developments are beginning to be studied such as the ability of Chinese NGOs to influence government policy-making, the growing numbers of Chinese NGOs interested in operating abroad, and the government purchasing of services from NGOs. They also demonstrated that both China and foreign-based researchers are beginning to move beyond the boundaries and limitations that previously restrained their research scope and focus.

## Community Foundations

*By Eleanor W. Sacks, visiting scholar at the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy*

In the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Cleveland Foundation (Ohio), the first community foundation in the United States, Nick Deychakiwsky of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, which has been a long-term supporter of community philanthropy around the world, put together a panel on community foundations. After the regular process for paper proposals was completed, only one paper about community foundations was received and accepted – a paper by Professor Jenny Harrow of the Cass School of Business in London, England and Professor Tobias Jung of the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. Their paper reported on their research on community foundations in the United Kingdom. In addition to Professors Harrow and Jung, Nick Deychakiwsky recruited other panelists to discuss community foundations established in other contexts. Eleanor W. Sacks discussed the history of community foundations in the United States. Marie-Luise Stoll-Stefan, a founder of the Community Foundation in Wiesbaden and deputy chair of the German community foundation group, a section of the German Association of Foundations, was asked to discuss the community foundation movement in Germany. Marwa el Daly of Egypt talked about the formation and activities of the community foundation she established in the Maadi neighborhood of Cairo, Egypt, the Waqfayet al Maadi Community Foundation.

The session had a very natural flow to the presentations. Eleanor Sacks started out with a snapshot showing the large number and enormous wealth of community foundations in the US today. She then went back to examine how and why community foundations formed in the US 100 years ago, in a period that also saw the formation of the first large private foundations based on industrial wealth, by the likes of Andrew Carnegie, Olivia Sage and John D. Rockefeller. She discussed the unique nature of US community foundations as 501(c)3 public charities, and the requirement that they must fund raise from the general public in order to maintain their privileged status. She explored the environment of Cleveland in 1914 and how the social and economic environment, as well as the charitable infrastructure in Cleveland and US traditions of philanthropy, shaped the choices its founder made in structuring and positioning the first community foundation. She looked at the roles community foundations can play and which ones took priority in the early years of US community foundations. She closed with some questions about the direction of community foundations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and whether, given the large number of community foundations and vast differences in asset size, they are still a single movement. The Council on Foundations has recently stopped doing member services which may encourage the further fragmentation of the movement.

Professors Harrow and Jung talked about the state of community foundations in the UK, which were first formed in the 1970s. The charitable infrastructure in the UK is incredibly dense and there are many actors competing for charitable dollars, many with overlapping missions. The United Way has recently decided to open shop in the UK, which will further complicate the picture, as its mission is very close to what community foundations do. They examined the 40 out of 47 community foundations in the UK that have been certified by the national support organization. Community foundations in the UK are not differentiated from other types of charities or other types of foundations. There is only one designation in the UK – charitable status. Community foundations appear to be less coherent as a movement than they may have been earlier. The number of community foundations has declined recently. In some cases this has been due to mergers, but a few have closed. A number have changed their names to sound more generic, which means it is no longer certain what they are

or what they want to be. Some of the larger ones appear to be acting more like private foundations than community foundations. The future is not clear and certainly complicated.

Germany is the country with the second largest number of community foundations – over 400 – and they are primarily city-based, although some are now merging to become statewide or regional. They were introduced in 1996 when the head of Bertelsmann founded the first community foundation in Germany in the corporation's hometown of Guetersloh. Most German community foundations operate differently than US or UK community foundations. They are operational, that is they design and run their own programs. They do not act as intermediary organizations that take money from donors and make grants to other charities to support their programs. This is a traditional way for German foundations to be structured and to operate. It works well in their context. Most community foundations are small and do not have large assets. Most are run completely by volunteers. They design programs that will have an impact in their community. Advertising the projects attracts donors to the community foundation to help fund the projects. Germany has a very coherent community foundation movement, and a strong support organization. The number, size and impact of German community foundations will continue to grow.

Marwa el Daly began her research into philanthropy in Egypt as a student and researcher at the American University in Cairo. She had the idea that the traditional Islamic form of endowed giving, the waqf, could be reinvigorated and be the basis for a community foundation in Egypt. Waqfs had been a common and popular way for donors to support non-profit institutions such as schools and hospitals in the Islamic world. They were so widespread in Egypt that the Egyptian government in the 20<sup>th</sup> century decided they were an independent power base. It took them over and consolidated them under a state Ministry of Waqfs. This government takeover effectively killed their appeal as a form of giving for individuals in Egypt. Dr. el Daly was able to receive government approval for establishing an independent waqf and the Waqfayet al Maadi was born in 2007. They have programs that focus on children and the arts, on education and on issues of social justice. They recently held a street fair, which was purposefully held on a Friday, the traditional day of protests in Egypt, to demonstrate their activities and showcase the work they are doing. There were no protests in her neighborhood that day and the Prime Minister of Egypt came to the street fair and stayed for two hours. His attention to what the community foundation is accomplishing was covered on TV and raised their profile substantially in Egypt. Dr. el Daly is involved with other community foundations around the world on projects such as issues of social justice, and has started a YouthBank to encourage philanthropy by young people. This is a program championed by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland. She has been consulting with other community foundations around the world to learn from them and to help them understand what a community foundation is and what it can do.

About 35 people attended the session and were highly engaged in the discussion. Questions came from individuals from South Africa, Canada, Japan and from other countries. They wanted to know more about how community foundations operated in specific contexts and whether and how they could be translated to their countries. This session was very coherent and well designed, perhaps because it was conceived as a special session on a particular topic of interest to researchers from around the world. More sessions of this type would be welcome.