

Building Bridges with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS)

by Mary Byrne McDonnell*

In November 1998, the Council signed an agreement of cooperation with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences—the largest social science institution in the People's Republic of China. The agreement was signed on the occasion of the visit of an unusually high-ranking CASS delegation that included the new CASS president Li Tieying. It is an agreement “in principle,” based on similar agreements the Council has negotiated with a variety of international academic institutions.

CASS and the Council have agreed to a set of principles, including reciprocity and non-exclusivity—that facilitate research and training efforts such as communication, visas, sponsorship and hosting. The range of issues we may work on together is large, encompassing all the current SSRC portfolio of interests and then some. Cooperation is to take three forms initially: delegations and training missions, research and infrastructure development and workshops and scientific meetings. In the coming year we have agreed to develop a concrete plan for further cooperation and to convene two workshops, one in each country, for staff of CASS and SSRC to exchange information and to provide recommendations for local participants at the request of either organization. CASS is interested primarily in the Council's problem-oriented work and sees an opportunity to interact with staff and scholars associated with these programs.

The formal signing ceremony presided over by SSRC Interim President Orville Gilbert Brim and the CASS president came after a year of negotiation with CASS. More important, it represents the culmination of a long effort to re-engage the Council with China and Chinese scholars, which began when former Council president David Featherman and I visited Beijing at CASS's invitation in the summer of 1991.

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At that time, we wanted to re-open the possibility of work in China in order to involve China and Chinese scholars in the Council's emerging transnational and comparative research agenda.

The Council has been engaged in China since 1966 with the joint founding of the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China (CSCPRC) by SSRC, the National Academy of Sciences and the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS). The first decade of contact under CSCPRC auspices focused on the sciences; CASS itself was formed in 1977 and social sciences then began to emerge as a significant part of



Back to the future: Kenneth Prewitt and Huan Xiang in 1979.

CSCPRC programs. The Council, and its president at the time, Kenneth Prewitt, was a key player in those early years, hosting, for example, the 1979 visit of Huan Xiang, the vice-president of CASS. His visit, heading the highest-ranking delegation of social scientists to date, followed closely the signing of an agreement enabling social science to be a real part of CSCPRC work. The large-scale exchange that followed resulted in the training of those who are now the middle generation of China scholars here, as well as enormous numbers of Chinese students in the social sciences.

Despite interest on both sides, very little was possible in 1991. Social sciences were still in disrepute following Tiananmen Square, and CASS was in the early stages of privatization after years as a line item in the national budget. Conditions for creative social science appeared to be at a low ebb in both Beijing and Shanghai. On the home front, the Joint Committee structure assigned responsibility for working with China to ACLS. These factors meant that the

idea of forming a partnership with CASS was put on the back burner.

Many things have changed in the past six years. SSRC now has an East Asia program that de facto includes China as a subject and Chinese as participants. In addition, the Committee for Scholarly Communication with China (CSCC, formerly CSCPRC), the conduit for CASS contacts with the American academy and vice versa, is considerably less active than it was in the 1970s and 1980s, following severe funding cuts. Meanwhile, CASS has emerged from its post-Tiananmen restructuring stronger both financially and politically; no longer able to depend solely on CSCPRC, it is searching for partners.

The emergence of social science as a force for improving social conditions in China is in part signaled by the appointment of Li Tieying. As the eldest son of one of China's foremost revolutionaries, Li was for many years senior among "the princes" and was considered likely to attain one of the country's highest offices. He is a member of the politburo of the Central Committee and this is the first time CASS has ever been headed by as powerful a political leader. He traveled to New York with a secretary and a bodyguard and was attended here by a full complement of Chinese-language press. For CASS, this

appointment is a milestone in its efforts to raise the visibility and effectiveness of social sciences within China; for Li, it may be an effective sidelining from the top ranks of political power.

At our meeting in New York Li's forceful intellect, curiosity and openness to new ways of thinking was evident despite the formal setting and the constraints imposed by interpretation. It was clear that he has the personal strength and political clout to create the conditions to allow a creative and thoughtful social science to develop at CASS. Given his senior position within the ruling elite, he should be able to minimize bureaucratic impediments to international collaboration between CASS and foreign partners. Scholars we spoke with at CASS hope that such a powerful president makes it more likely that their work will be read in high government circles, and that real data may actually come to have an impact on policy formulation.

The institutional bridge we are beginning to construct has clear benefits both to CASS and the SSRC. Throughout its history, the Council has served as a bridge—linking disciplines, researchers from many walks of life and countries around the world. By drawing on and bringing into productive intercourse the interests and abilities of the academy, the foundations, government and the publics who support and may find useful the work emerging from its activities, the SSRC has sought to enrich the store of knowledge available for managing generations-old social problems.

As social science unfolds once more in China, the Council may again be in position to contribute to its development and deployment while enriching our own work in areas of consequence to us all. As a first step, we hope to build a relationship of trust and cooperation between the Council and CASS with the intent (as a second step) of increasing the participation of Chinese scholars and of their research in the wider relationships and conversations we facilitate.

Today it is almost unimaginable to work on East Asia or on many thematic problems of regional or global concern without including China as a case and Chinese scholars as knowledgeable researchers. It is crucial to our work to be able to engage with research in China on issues of importance to us and to have easy access to Chinese scholars and develop our networks there. With this new agreement we hope that we will be able to provide access within

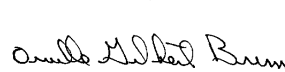
·双方将就共同感兴趣的问题联合组织和参加科研会议；
·双方将各自继续独立举办研讨会和会议，并邀请另一国学者参加；
二、经费
合作必须是双方共同感兴趣的和互利的的问题，同意本着互惠的原则使用现有资源。鉴于双方将来都会面临财政困难，费用问题将按个案处理的原则逐一解决。
三、根据以上情况，双方1998—1999年度将：
·共同制定具体合作计划
·为美国社会科学研究理事会人员在中国社会科学院举办一次专题研讨会，由中国社会科学院提供研讨会中方参加者名单。同样，为中国社会科学院在美国社会科学研究理事会举办一次专题研讨会。由美方提供美方参加研讨会名单
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中国社会科学院代表



一九九八年十一月九日于纽约

社会科学研究理事会代表



一九九八年十一月九日于纽约

A page of the agreement signed by Li Tieying and Orville Gilbert Brim.

China for our fellows, and will gradually be able to hold the kinds of conferences and research planning meetings that have been so successful elsewhere.

Changes at the Council and at CASS, coupled with our new agreement, provide the conditions that will make it possible to reach these goals. Our task remains to develop an East Asia program that fully includes China, and to engage some of the questions involved with “building the social sciences” in China as we have elsewhere. While some aspects of our emerging work with China may be bilateral—the development of social sciences through research and training projects, for example—other aspects will be multilateral, connecting Chinese scholars and scholars into emerging networks on larger regional and global questions.

We will begin small, by linking China to other

projects already underway at the Council in areas of mutual interest. For example, we hope to add Chinese members to our emerging networks on poverty, on labor issues or on memory and society. We plan to appoint a scholar from CASS to our East Asia Regional Advisory Panel; we want to increase linkages between Chinese scholars and other researchers in other parts of Asia around topics of mutual interest. As the East Asia RAP becomes a board for the region we may consider other offices in Asia to complement our Tokyo office. On their side, CASS’s privatization is generating funds that can be used to bring Chinese scholars to events and projects abroad.

Both bilateral and multilateral approaches will ensure that Chinese scholars have a strong role in the international community of social scientists fostered by Council activities in the coming years. ■