

## CHAPTER 3 INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SOCIOLOGY IN CHINA

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### The Development of Sociology in China before 1949

Sociology as a discipline of social sciences was introduced into China around the beginning of the 20th century. Yan Fu (1853-1921) translated the works written by Herbert Spencer (*The Study of Sociology*, 1873) into the Chinese language and published it in 1903. At that time, many Chinese scholars and young students were searching for theories to guide their approaches towards the modernization of China which suffered a great deal from the invasions of imperialist countries (especially Britain, Russia and Japan).

The first course in sociology was offered at St. John University in Shanghai in 1905 or 1908. (Yang Yabin 1987, pp.30-31) Since 1911, Chinese students have gone to study sociology in the United States and other Western countries. Many of them started to teach sociology or do sociological research in China after their return. In 1913, the first department of sociology was established in Hujiang University which was managed by the American Christian organization. The first department of sociology to be established in a Chinese-managed university was in Xiamen University in 1921. (Han Mingmo 1987, pp.40) Around this time, many books and articles were also being translated and published in China introducing Western theories and research methods of sociology.

In the 1930s, several sociology research institutions were also established in China. Among them, the Social Research Institute under the Chinese Education and Culture Foundation (Beijing), and the Research Institute of Social Sciences at Academia Sinica (Nanjing) both conducted field studies before finally merging into one in 1934. Their studies concentrated on social stratification, rural economy, population, urban living costs, labor, etc. Based on their findings, many books were published and had a wide influence on young intellectuals and students.

The Chinese Association of Sociology was established in 1922 for the first time in China's history, based on the suggestion by Yu Tianxiu. However its activities were very limited due to the small number of professional sociologists and political pressure at that time. In 1930 it was replaced by the South-East Association of Sociology, which was established in 1928. Professor Sun Benwen served as the first President of this new national association. Eight

annual meetings of the Association were held between 1930 and 1947. Several journals were also published by branches of the association during the same time. (Han Mingmo 1987, pp.106)

During the war of resistance against Japanese invasion (1931-1945), most Chinese sociologists moved to south-western China, especially Yunnan and Sichuan. There, Professor Wu Wenzao and Professor Fei Xiaotong encouraged young sociologists to do community studies and called for the "indigenization (or Sinoization) of sociology". Several departments and research institutes were established by sociologists in Yunnan and Sichuan under their leadership. The teaching of sociology persisted and many community studies were conducted in south-western China during that period. Some of the study results were published both in China and the West (Fei 1945)

After the surrender of Japan in 1945, many sociologists returned to Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing and other major cities in eastern China with universities and institutions. Sociology experienced rapid development following the re-establishment of these academic organizations. In 1947, there were nineteen departments of sociology and two joint departments (history and sociology) at universities in China, with over 600 students studying sociology. (Han Mingmo 1987, pp.101) Before 1949, the influence of Western countries was very strong in China, including in the field of sociology. According to a study in 1947 by Professor Sun Benwen, among the total 144 teachers (including professors, associated professors, and lecturers) who taught sociology at universities in China, 10 were Americans, 97 obtained their degrees in the United States or Europe, 10 obtained training in Japan, and only 27 were trained in China. (Yang Yabin 1987, pp.326)

### **The Reform of the Chinese University System in 1952**

In December 1952, the Ministry of Education of the Central Government reorganized China's entire university system. Most departments and institutes of sociology were merged into other disciplines, only two departments of sociology at Zhongshan University and Yunnan University remained. As a result of this adjustment, all teaching and research activities in sociology ceased for almost three decades. In 1957, population studies and sociology were both seriously criticized as "capitalist pseudosciences" and became "forbidden disciplines." Every sociologist abandoned any work related to sociology in 1957. A small number of the famous sociologists such as Professor Pan Guangdan, Professor Wu Wenzao, Professor Wu Zelin, Professor Fei Xiaotong and Professor Lin Yaohua, turned to the study of ethnic minorities. The rest switched to administration and other activities. This situation did not change until 1979, when the people of China started to reconsider their ideology, policies, and the results of the "Cultural Revolution".

### **The Re-establishment of Sociology in China**

In one of his speeches in 1979, Den Xiaoping mentioned that "we have ignored the studies of political science, law, sociology and international politics for years, now it is the time to catch up". After that, Professor Fei Xiaotong was asked by the national authorities to take up the task of re-establishing sociology as a discipline of social sciences in China. At the end of a national meeting of sociology in March 1979, the new Chinese Association of Sociology was established and Fei Xiaotong became its first president. He also became the founder and the first director of the Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in 1980. This Institute organized two training seminars in sociology in 1981 and 1982. Several of Professor Fei's old friends, who were teaching sociology in the United States or Hong Kong, were invited to give lectures at these seminars in order to introduce the progress of sociology in Western countries. Nankai University, the Hubei Association of Sociology, and Shanghai University also organized several training seminars in sociology. The participants of these seminars then became active scholars in universities and research academies, and established departments and institutes in the provinces and autonomous regions.

The period between 1979-1985 was the first stage of re-establishment of sociology in China. During this time, the task was to establish new institutions (departments and research institutes all over China) and to train a new generation of sociologists. The period between 1986-1996 was the second stage. During this stage the young generation of sociologists, who either received their training abroad or within China, started the teaching and research activities that have made sociology well-known in China. Each year, hundreds of high school graduates apply to the departments of sociology at universities while hundreds of graduates with B.A. or M.A. degrees find jobs in government and academic institutions.

### **Sociology Institutions in China Today**

In 1995, there were thirteen departments of sociology and two joint departments (philosophy and sociology) at universities in China. In addition, four universities or colleges had a division of sociology under other departments. There were also research institutes of sociology at five universities and two universities established institutes related to sociology (such as institutes of social development). Among the total 30 municipalities, provinces, and autonomous regions of China, 20 have an institute of sociology under its provincial academy of social sciences, five have a joint institute (such as the Institute of Social and Sciences, Technology and Development in Heilongjiang, and the Institute of Sociology and Population Studies of Hebei, etc.), three cities also established

institutes of sociology. (Cf. Appendix 1)(Institute of Sociology, CASS 1996, pp.5-6)

The Chinese Association of Sociology only recruits group members, university departments and research institutes may apply for membership. The Association has 29 group members, and its secretariat is located at the Institute of Sociology, CASS. The editorial department of journal the *Sociological Research* is also located in this institute.

In 1995, two municipalities, one autonomous region, ten provinces and two cities also established provincial associations of sociology. Under the guidance of the national association, there are eight associations focusing on special subjects: (1) sociology of education, (2) sociology of population and environment, (3) sociology of social development and social security, (4) rural sociology, (5) sociology of sports, (6) methodology, (7) sociology of ethnicity, and (8) rural-urban community studies. By a rough estimate, the total number of people who teach and work at these departments and institutes or whose work related to sociology is about 1500 to 1800.

By their teaching, especially research activities, Chinese sociologists now have a certain impact on society and the decision-making process of the government. The best example is the development of small towns and township enterprises. Following the practice of the new household responsibility system in rural China, millions of surplus rural laborers were released from agriculture and searched for other sources of income. The cities, which were still under the planned economy and management systems, could not absorb this huge labor force. At that time, Professor Fei Xiaotong suggested the development of small towns and establishing them as new centers of rural industry to absorb these jobless farmers. He pointed out that this new strategy of development could be a new pattern of urbanization and industrialization, providing a balanced city-town-village system and a parallel distribution of industry. This new strategy might avoid the urban problems of other developing countries, where the concentration of poor farmers in big cities resulted in urban poverty and slums. This suggestion was picked up by China's leaders (Hu Yaobang) and became the base of the country's policy on urbanization. In the 1990s, township and village enterprises have become the most important part of China's economic growth, consisting of over one third of industrial production and China's exports.

The studies of rural-urban migration, women and family transition, crime, youth, relations among ethnic groups, social organization, religion, popular culture, regional development patterns, social stratification and mobility, medical sociology, and the human dimensions in environmental changes, etc. carried out by Chinese sociologists now have a certain influence on Chinese society. Accompanying the new policies of system reform and opening to the outside world, the entire Chinese society has been experiencing tremendous transition and adjustment. Many new social phenomena and problems appear and the

analyses of these issues need sociology. Therefore, we can predict that sociology will develop rapidly in China over the next decade.

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