

China-U.S. Relations: Trade Diplomacy, and Research
November 14-17, 2005
Beijing, China

Research Summary

Session Title: Quality of Life Issues in Contemporary Chinese Cities: the Impacts of Rapid Growth and Change

Co-Chairs (name and affiliation):

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| U.S.: | Dr. Robin Abrams |
| Chinese: | Dr. Gong Chen |

Other Collaborators:

From TAMU: Dr. Chanam Lee; Dr. Chang-Shan Huang; PHD student Xuemei Zhu; PHD Student Bin Kang; PHD Student Zhipeng Lu. From The University of Texas at Austin: Dr. Simon Atkinson.

From Peking University: Prof. Xiaochun Qiao; Prof. Cordia Chu; Prof. Xiaoying Zheng; Prof. Jie Hu; Prof. Qizhi Mao; Prof. Xiaoying Zheng

Session Summary (include summary of field of research):

The session included a diverse collection of topics relating to sustainable urban development and the impacts of rapid growth, reflecting the diversity of the presenters, who ranged from architects, landscape architects and urban planners to demographers, environmental scientists and sociologists. Topics discussed included the preservation of vernacular housing in Beijing; creating walkable neighborhoods in new housing developments; the impacts of neighborhood design on obesity in children; new trends in housing for elderly; the impacts of environmental pollution on population health; loss of sense of place in replacement housing; and the urban redevelopment potential of the upcoming Beijing Olympics. Discussion upon conclusion of the presentations was that there was some element in each presentation linking to each of the others.

Findings/Recommendations:

The lively discussion that followed each of the presentations did not allow enough time to reach collective findings or recommendations. What did occur was the linking up of scholars who were working in very similar areas. This was particularly the case with Dr. Chu's presentation on building healthy cities, in which she cited case studies in Korea, and Dr. Lee, who is from Korea, whose research focuses on building healthy cities, and who had been seeking contacts and case studies in Korea. The American faculty and students, each pursuing research on aspects of China's growth-related problems, were quite pleased to find Chinese faculty working equally hard on aspects of the same problems, such as resolving housing and health issues for the floating population. One of the most interesting discussions was concerned with the search for a definition of "Chinese-ness", among those wishing to preserve a sense of place in China's cities, neighborhoods, and housing communities.

Future Collaborations and Justification:

The topic of quality of life in the face of rapid change in China is unfolding on a daily basis. All faculty participants agreed that research in this area is new, and collaborations will prove extremely fruitful, for the purpose of peer review at the very least. The many coincidental connections among participants prove the world is actually a small place. Prof. Jie Hu, who teaches Landscape Architecture at Tsinghua University and is the Master Planner for the Beijing 2008 Olympics, is working to form a new department with the American professor who supervised Dr. Huang's dissertation at U. Penn. Jie Hu and Prof. Abrams linked up after the sessions, because the use of Olympic master plans as a catalyst for urban redevelopment is a research focus of Dr. Abrams. She was able to tour the Beijing Olympic site with Jie Hu, and return to his office to view the plans, and participate in a mini-workshop on one of the facilities. She has since proposed another round table discussion on Olympic master planning at the 2006 National Meeting of the American Society of Landscape Architects in which Jie Hu will participate, along with the President of Sasaki Associates, one of the most prestigious international landscape architecture firms, which led the first master plan team for Beijing 2008. Sasaki heard from Jie Hu about the round table and asked to be included. I believe this will be one of the best-attended sessions at ASLA 2006, and will be published in the proceedings.

The round table discussions and paper presentations in this session are truly just the tip of the iceberg. Urban conditions are changing so rapidly in China, that researchers struggle to keep up and the data is quickly out of date. Essentially, we found that we were interested in the same things – and the American faculty had access to research funding and resources, while the Chinese faculty could witness change first hand and share their experiences.

We would very much welcome the opportunity to continue this discussion in 2007.