

Advanced Training Workshop

Historical Materials and Methods: The New Horizon for Research on 1950s China

Co-sponsors: Harvard-Yenching Institute and History Department, Fudan University

In recent years, China has attracted attention from all corners of the globe; however, academia still needs to strengthen its understanding of the political, economic, social and cultural changes in post-1949 China. Undoubtedly, China's more than sixty years of changes and experiences have raised a host of challenges to theories in both the humanities and the social sciences, and have provided an excellent opportunity for research on contemporary China to be integrated into the international mainstream discussion in these fields.

Over the past two decades, the Chinese government has promoted information openness. A majority of local archives have already, according to regulations, released pre-1978 archival material to scholars and the public, including a particularly large amount of archival material from the 1950s. Scholars have also begun to value the collection and use of non-governmental historical materials. Meanwhile, a great amount of newly available CCP historical documents and gazetteers have also been edited and published, including the individual collected works and selected works of Party leaders. But have these new materials received enough attention? And have they been brought into researchers' purview? How should we decode and analyze these new materials?

As most historical researchers realize, scholarship on contemporary China has not yet seriously begun to utilize these aforementioned new materials. A majority of scholars still use readily-available older materials, such as publicly published works, statistical yearbooks, newspapers and periodicals, etc., to carry out research. It would be unfortunate if scholars were unable to combine new historical sources with older materials.

How can the academic world bring these historical materials on contemporary China, which have rapidly increased in volume over the past decade, into the mainstream of social science research? How can it connect these materials to existing theories in the humanities and social sciences? And how can it use these materials to carry out cutting-edge empirical and theoretical analyses? These problems pose significant challenges to researchers of contemporary China. In the face of this vast amount of new historical material, we hope that scholars in this field, whether based in China or overseas, will be able to form a new research network, using the most complete set of new and old historical sources to further the development of research on China and thereby move the field towards a new horizon.

For this purpose, Fudan University and the Harvard-Yenching Institute have cooperated to convene an advanced training workshop entitled "Historical Materials and Methods: The New Horizon for Research on 1950s China" at Fudan University from January 10-16, 2012. We plan to enroll about 20 young scholars (including current doctoral students and young faculty and researchers) to participate in an intensive one-week training program. The workshop will invite 6-10 Chinese and foreign senior scholars to deliver special lectures, in which they will share their

personal research experiences and their practical experiences directly related to the use of new historical sources, including how to consult, decode, and analyze materials. The workshop will also set aside time for attendees to discuss and explore how to employ new materials in academic research, particularly how to utilize new research methods and develop original perspectives from primary source materials.

Throughout the training process, attendees will be encouraged to draw upon their personal academic backgrounds and research interests to come up with original research agendas and innovative ideas. After the workshop finishes, the program will select a very small number of exceptional attendees from Asian Universities to spend the following academic year (2012-13) at the Harvard-Yenching Institute to pursue additional studies. Through this kind of positive academic exchange, we hope to significantly improve the quality of academic studies on the early history of the People's Republic of China.