

# Chapter 12

## Epilogue

**Rudi Hartmann and Jing'ai Wang**

Now that the manuscript to *A Comparative Geography of China and the U.S.* is coming to its completion we cannot help but recall the 8 years of work on this book together with our geographer colleagues from both China and the U.S., from the original idea, outline, organization, project funding, review and revisions to completion. We highly appreciate all the institutions, teachers and students who have been part of the formulation and realization of the book with their input.

The idea of launching a book project on the topic of *A Comparative Geography of China and the U.S.* developed over a number of years and the beginnings of this intellectual and organizational venture can be retraced on parallel tracks which eventually came together after several meetings Professors Jing'ai Wang and Rudi Hartmann had in Beijing in 2007.

Jing'ai Wang's idea of a book was sparked in 2005, the year the undergraduate course "China Geography" at Beijing Normal University (BNU) was identified as a model course with national significance. In the process of developing the course appropriate textbooks and other reading materials had to be selected. The idea of compiling a book on the comparative geography of China and the U.S. transpired and was subsequently pursued. In 2007, the Regional Geographical Teaching Team at Beijing Normal University qualified as the National Team. Jing'ai Wang as the leader of a BNU faculty team published a "China Geography Tutorial" textbook which included comparative topics of China and the U.S.

Rudi Hartmann's interest in teaching a Geography of China in a comparative context was steered by two events. A first visit to the People's Republic of China in 1990 (to Shanghai, Hangzhou and Suzhou) at the occasion of an IGU Geographic Education Symposium held at the University of Hong Kong would eventually result

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in a longer stay in China and more exposure to China's geography. The occasion was teaching two geography classes to Chinese students of the International College Beijing, a joint venture of the University of Colorado Denver with China Agricultural University, during Spring Semester 1996. Here, first contact with Chinese geography colleagues in Beijing including Professor Lansheng Zhang from Beijing Normal University materialized. Back at home in Denver, a new Geography of China course was laid out soon after and became a standard part of the teaching programs of the University of Colorado Denver. An American-Chinese education conference held in Beijing in December 2005 was an opportunity to reconnect with BNU, this time with Professor Xiuqi Fang who served as host for a 2007 visit to BNU and as the crucial link and connection to Jing'ai Wang harboring the idea to a book.

Meetings of Jing'ai Wang and Rudi Hartmann in May/June as well as in October 2007 when Professor Peijun Shi joined in as well led to the first full outline of the book. The agenda of the book project was advanced in meetings that followed in 2008 and the years after with mutual visits in China and the U.S. The 'roadmap' to the book saw the following stops, phases and involvements:

- 2008: Jing Chen's participation (on behalf of Jing'ai Wang) at the panel session "Teaching the Geography of China" at the AAG Meeting 2008 in Boston (Wang et al. 2008)
- 2009: Jing'ai Wang's participation in the Las Vegas AAG Meeting, with a paper presentation on the Wenchuan Earthquake 2008 (Shi et al. 2009) and Rudi Hartmann's visit to Beijing, with teaching 'A Geography of North America' segment for the National Geographical Teaching Team at BNU
- 2010: Two special sessions, "A Comparative Geography of China and the U.S.: Physical and Human Geography Perspectives" and "Comparing China and the U.S." Geographic Agendas, Potentials and Prospects, at the Washington, D.C. AAG Meeting, with participation of a core group of the book team from China and the U.S. and the layout of an agenda, general statements and programmatic assessments of the comparative approach (see, for instance, Wang et al. 2010 and Hartmann 2010), with the signing of a book contract
- 2011: Jing'ai Wang and other BNU geographers' participation in the Seattle AAG Meeting and more meetings advancing the book project, followed by Rudi Hartmann's visit to Beijing with participation in BNU's Regional Geography Salon and later meetings at the occasion of the annual Chinese Geographic Education Conference in Xining, Qinghai Province with fieldtrips to Lhasa, Tibet
- 2012: Jing'ai Wang and other BNU geographers' participation in the New York AAG Meeting, with further meetings of the book editing team and a first full print out version of the book, followed by Rudi Hartmann's visit to Beijing during the Thanksgivings' Week in November
- 2013: Jing'ai Wang and other BNU geographers' participation in the Los Angeles AAG Meeting, with a joint paper session "Comparing China and the U.S.: Geographic Perspectives in an Era of Globalization and Emerging Asia", two book editing meetings and discussion of a third version of the book, followed by

Rudi Hartmann's visit to Beijing in September and the submission of the complete manuscript in October 2013.

All the meetings in China and the United States included field trips and local workshops facilitating a better mutual understanding of the diverse geographies of both countries. Thousands of kilometers/miles were traveled by the editors, contributors and associated staff members of the book as well as a multitude of e-mail messages and progress reports exchanged. And yet, the promise of the comparative approach of a regional geography of China and the U.S. is not yet fulfilled, and items on the agenda for work on this front remain.

During the 8 years of work on the book the socio-economic, cultural and ecological environment in China, in the U.S. and worldwide has undergone slight or significant changes. While this outlook cannot give a complete list of observations of such trends which may have had an impact on the living conditions in China and the United States, a few items should be presented as future tasks of a comparative geography approach.

Mobility, travel and tourism in China and the U.S. have seen tremendous growth and change. After decades of slow but continuous increase in recreational and business travel China has recently become a leading nation in international tourism (outbound travel) as well as in the provision of services, accommodation and transportation for the domestic tourism market at home. Besides the availability of more international, national and regional flights it is the new high speed train infrastructure that has changed the mobility of Chinese citizens and the regional economies of the country because of a greater interconnectedness across the nation. While the U.S. has made only more adaptive changes in the improvement of local and regional mass transit systems, the agenda in the implementation of new transportation technologies has also reached the policy makers in Washington, D.C. and in a number of states including California.

The potential of a changing cultural and social geography in China and the U.S. has not been fully explored yet. One of the more remarkable changes in the uses of languages in both countries are a wider acceptance of English in communication in China, in particular among the younger generation, and the increasing adoption of Mandarin in the U.S. high school system. An increasing exchange of students (by number and time spent) both ways, Chinese students attending U.S. colleges and universities as well as American students finally making the decisive step to learn about Chinese civilization abroad, are encouraging signs for the prospect of a better mutual understanding.

Global climate change as well as a continued globalization in the world economy and their impacts on China and the U.S. should be addressed in any future comparative regional studies. While it is not easy to fully integrate such trends in comparative regional analysis, it is a growing concern for many. Regional expressions of climate change and the greater reach of a globalizing economy can be examined certainly for China and the U.S., and comparative notes on short-term or long-term changes in both countries can highlight such global trends.

There is a need for continued efforts in a comparative geography on many fronts. The potential that comparative studies hold in geographic education can hardly be overstated. A path to a better mutual understanding of the regional geographies of the two countries goes a long way, beyond pre-conceived images and stereotype contrasts. Geographic education in form of a comparative regional analysis can make the difference.

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