



The Harvard-Yenching Institute: The Past and the Present

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Introduction of Major Institutions

The Harvard-Yenching Institute: The Past and the Present

The Harvard-Yenching Institute was founded in 1928 through the generosity of the estate of Charles M. Hall. As an independent foundation, since 1928, the Harvard-Yenching Institute has been dedicated to advancing



higher education in Asia in the humanities and social sciences, with special attention to the study of Chinese culture. Located on the campus of Harvard University, the Institute currently has partnerships with more than fifty universities and research institutions in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Singapore and Thailand. The Institute supports doctoral scholarships, visiting fellowships, academic publications, advanced training programs as well as conferences and other scholarly initiatives in Asia, at Harvard University, and elsewhere. All these programs and activities are intended to promote higher education and research in Asian studies as well as other topics in the humanities and social sciences.

The Institute has always been housed on the campus of Harvard University. A few decades ago, it was located at Boylston Hall at Harvard Yard, next to the Widener Library. Currently, the Institute has two offices: the Program Office is located in Vanserg Hall, next to Harvard Divinity School, and the Director's Office is located at 2 Divinity Avenue, the same building where the Harvard-Yenching Library is located.

In the years since 1928, the Harvard-Yenching Institute has become one of the leading institutions in the world and the most influential institute in the United States concerned with the humanities and social sciences with an emphasis on cultural studies of China and East Asia. The original purpose of

founding the Institute is to help establish a program of Far Eastern Studies at Harvard as well as to assist the development of the field of Chinese studies at Yenching University in Beijing. As the program has developed in the past 80 years, the Institute has been making great efforts in promoting scholarly communication among Asian scholars and between Asian scholars and their counterparts in other regions of the world. Although it has been focused on scholarship related to East Asia with a focus on China, the Harvard-Yenching Institute has played an active role in fostering the entire range of Asian Studies at Harvard.

By the late 1960s, the field of Asian Studies was quite well established and widely recognized at Harvard while Asian Studies program was springing up at universities throughout the United States. The HYI has flourished over all these years since its formation because of the continuing and untiring efforts of many brilliant scholars.

Since 1954, the core program of the Harvard-Yenching Institute has been its visiting scholars program. It offers full fellowship for faculty in top East Asian University to come to the Harvard-Yenching Institute for a one-year research stay. From then up to the early 1980s, the Harvard-Yenching Institute had regularly recruited East Asian faculty from Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Taiwan to come the Institute as visiting scholars. Through this program, young scholars (in the early years of the program this meant individuals up to the age of 40) who already had teaching positions would come to the HYI for one or two years with a full scholarship that consisted of round trip airfare, health insurance and a monthly stipend. Upon invited and requested, the partner universities and research institutions in each of these countries nominate younger faculty as candidates for the Visiting Scholars Program. This practice has been continued throughout the present with Chinese top universities and research institutions to join the program in the early 1980s. Currently, 19 universities/research institutions in China had established partnership with the Harvard-Yenching Institute, and as the partner universities and research institutions in other regions and countries in East Asia and Southeast Asia, they are eligible to nominate candidates to the Visiting Scholars program on annual basis.

A much smaller and relatively new program is the Visiting Fellows Program. This program was conceived by the former Director Patrick Hanan as a means of addressing what he described, in a report to the December 1987 Board of Trustees meeting, as “the problem of the brain drain from China” and a resultant “new Chinese government policy under which the number of people sent abroad for PhDs would be greatly reduced.” In response to these worrisome developments, Professor Hanan, according to the minutes of the meeting, “suggested a new approach – bringing the best young

candidates enrolled in Chinese universities' own PhD programs here for a year or two of training and dissertation research." This seems to be a supplementary approach to the existing Visiting Scholars program which had a hard time to get nominations from the Chinese partner universities. As the program evolved, faculty in the Asian Universities are required to have a PhD to land in a teaching position, whereas more and more graduate students in a Ph.D. program search for an opportunity as such. The Institute gradually started to accept applicants who are doctoral students/part-time instructor/teaching assistants as well as full-time graduate students and junior faculty members who are at the same time working toward a Ph.D. At the present, all the visiting fellows in residence are doctoral students who are working in their dissertation research and writing. Over the ensuing decades since the late 1980s, the program has offered many outstanding Asian doctoral students the great opportunity to study at the Institute, some of whom continue to remain in close touch as active and supportive HYI alumni.

The Institute has also supported graduate students from Asia in doctoral program at Harvard and other top-notch universities. This program has been terminated about 10 years ago, to be replaced by a joint doctoral program between the Harvard-Yenching Institute and National University of Singapore.

Since Professor Elizabeth Perry took over the directorship in 2008, the Harvard-Yenching Institute has started a series of advanced training program at Harvard and in Asian partner universities with field development as its focus and purpose. The Advanced Training Program is a recent initiative of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, in which a small group of promising young Asian scholars in particular fields of the humanities and social sciences are selected and brought together either at Harvard or in Asia. The Training Programs held in Cambridge involve close work with eminent scholars at Harvard and other major universities in the United States. The Training Program visiting scholars and fellows join academic activities organized by the academic community at large. The program aims to increase scholars' knowledge of new work in their field and to foster collaborative work as a community.

The Harvard-Yenching Institute also co-sponsors training programs held in Asia. The programs seek to bring together students and scholars from different disciplines across Asia and beyond to create a new network conducive to collaborative research. As part of the programs, HYI and its co-sponsoring institutions organize a series of lectures (including several by Harvard faculty). Following the conclusion of each training program, a small number of outstanding trainees may be invited to come to the Institute for a one-year research stay during the next academic year.

There have been a number of new program and initiatives that are introduced in response to the new environment and dynamics of Asian academia and the landscape of Asian Studies in the United State.

The new requirement that aim at further interaction and collaboration between the Harvard-Yenching Institute visiting scholars and fellows and faulty and students at Harvard and other universities and research institutions of the United States.

As a key institution on Asian Studies with an emphasis on China and Chinese, the Institute has been the most important sponsor for the Harvard-Yenching Library that carries the biggest collection on East Asian Studies outside Asia. Although the Harvard Yenching Library was administratively separated from the Institute and became part of the University Library system, the Library maintains a close relationship with the Institute. The Institute continues providing financial support to the Library and provides the best services ever for the visiting scholars and fellows during their research stay.

In addition, the Harvard-Yenching Institute has also sponsored a number of publication projects. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* was founded in 1936, and has without interruption since then pursued its mission to disseminate original, outstanding research and book reviews on the humanities in Asia, focusing at present on the areas of China, Japan, Korea, and Inner Asia. As scholarship has evolved, so has this Journal, but always while holding constant the commitment to serve authors and readers alike through the careful selection and editing of its contents. The other publication project overseen by the Asia Center Publications Program is the Harvard-Yenching Institute monograph series that consists of over 60 titles, and have published many outstanding works by junior scholars as well as well-established researchers. In China, The Institute sponsors 2 major publication projects; one is the *HYI-Sanlian Academic Series* that has published over 100 titles since the mid-1990s. This series has become the brand name for the publication of newly minted Ph.D. and junior scholars in the humanities and social science, and has contributed tremendously to a new generation of leading scholars in the field. The other is *China Scholarship* organized by Liu Dong of Tsinghua University in Beijing, China. The Harvard-Yenching Institute has recently started a new publication project with National Taiwan University Press to publish academic works in Chinese by scholars in wide Chinese speaking regions.

In the past 90 years since its founding year, the Harvard-Yenching Institute has been continuing its mission to support higher education and research in Asia with a focus on China. In order to continue this tradition, the Institute has always been well focused on the three aspects of its mission: building a

scholarly community through its visiting scholars and fellows and graduate students program, providing scholarly resources for its scholarly community through its support to the Harvard Yenching Library, and of course helping scholars to turn their research into influential end result, which are publications.