

Wang Jisi: Some Thoughts on American Studies in China

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The following interview was published in *American Studies* this summer on occasion of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Institute of American Studies under Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). The interview covers frequently discussed topics, particularly regarding the rise and fall of the US. At the same time, it is not optimistic about the depth of American studies in China or future prospects for the field's development.

Interviewee: Wang Jisi, former director of the Institute of American Studies at the CASS and former editor in chief of *American Studies*, now dean of the Institute of International Relations at Peking University and honorable chairman of the Institute of American Studies.

Interviewer: Xu Tongwu, researcher at the Institute of American Studies of CASS; Wei Hongxia, associate researcher at the Institute of American Studies of CASS.

Q: We know that you were the director of the Institute of American Studies at CASS from 1992~2005. After you assumed your post at the US Institute, which research topics did you focus on?

A: I focused mainly on three things. The first was identifying the comprehensive and long-term issues in America that the US Institute had to study, including the rise and fall of the US, which was a topic that Professor Zi Zhongyun mentioned repeatedly to me before she resigned. At that time, a lot of people were arguing about whether the US had only relatively weakened or had completely declined. The common view then was that the position of the US had undoubtedly declined but, as to the question of whether the decline was relative or absolute, there were a great many disputes.

The second focus was the study of US-Sino relations. Similar to studying the rise and fall of the US, studying US-Sino relations involves comprehensive research into all topics, including politics, economics, diplomacy, and military matters.

The third was the *American Studies* journal. Did we want to publish it? How would we do it? Of course, we insisted on publishing it. We also had American Studies

reference material at that time, which was later renamed as *American Panorama*. I took the publication of *American Studies* very seriously and worked hard for it to maintain its distinguishing characteristics. For quite a long period, we kept receiving all kinds of instructions in accordance with the current environment, which, if completely followed, would have prevented this journal from being an academic one.

Under relatively difficult circumstances, I always tried hard to create a comfortable academic environment and good research atmosphere in our Institute. Under my efforts, we reduced interpersonal friction and blocked, as much as possible, any external harmful factors which might have negatively influenced our Institute. There was a time when many institutes felt societal influence to become revenue earners, with some institutes going so far as to set up taxi companies. Some leaders asked me: "Wang Jisi, why aren't you thinking of ways to make more money?" I thought: where would our academic institution go to make money? This (making money trend) is not something that can last long; I saw this as a certainty and was determined not to follow suit. Instead, I went through every contact I had to expand exchange and communication opportunities and hunt for research funding. For example, I applied for funding from organizations such as the National Social Science Fund and Ford Foundation, held academic conferences and proceeding research projects together with other organizations, etc. Those several focuses constituted my main work after I came to the U.S. Institute.

Q: Would you like to share some research work you did after you became director of the US Institute? Or some important foreign affairs activities?

A: The activities of our institute cannot be separated from the wider, surrounding environment. One part is the academic environment; the other is the environment of domestic policy and US-Sino relations. For instance, at the beginning of the 1990's, everyone was debating the rise and fall of the US issue, and also what the principal contradictions of the world ultimately were. At that time, was the international environment for China very negative? Should China take a low profile and bide its time? Did we still need to maintain Sino-American relations? Regarding these questions, the US Institute had to issue its own opinions. Of course, we couldn't say that every researcher in our Institute held the same opinions, but we did have basic conclusions. At that time, there were seminars every few days, some open, some internal. I also took part in seminars at the central government level. Later, after Clinton's inauguration, there was a noise about China's most favored nation problem, but it was not serious. The most serious disturbances were Lee Teng-hui's visit to the US in 1995, followed by military exercises in the Taiwan Strait in 1996. Sino-American relations deteriorated, and then someone started to write "China can say no" types of books, which became the general attitude. There were some people asking whether the US still supported Taiwan independence. The mainstream judgment was that the US surely did. Before this Sino-American crisis, the bilateral conflict was basically political issues, yet after the 1995~1996 crisis, military factors became involved into

Sino-American relations. During this period, the US Institute held a lot of foreign affairs exchange activities. I remember clearly that the famous columnist of *The New York Times* and the writer of the book *The World is Flat*, Thomas Friedman, came to visit me, as I had made a deep impression on him. Some media reports said China would soon attack Taiwan by force. I told him that China's military exercises were not meant to actually begin a fight, but to give the Taiwan Independence forces and America a warning. After we spoke, Friedman published my views in *The New York Times*, which caused a big response. From then on, we became good friends and still keep in touch often.

Sino-American relations improved somewhat during 1997~1998 with an exchange of summit visits. Afterward, the Kosovo crisis and the embassy bombing event in 1999 occurred and once again led to great contention regarding Sino-American relations. Some people even began doubting China's reform and opening up policies. Now looking back, it was a bit shocking, but our central government controlled the situation and dealt with the crisis very well. In 2001, the South China Sea plane collision incident brought up related debates once more. Within these arguments, our US Institute researchers kept cool-headed and consistent with the central government without voicing opinions that overstepped the limits or might have embarrassed us now thinking back.

Speaking of foreign exchange, it was also related to these events. Many Americans came to our Institute, including Susan Shirk and Ken Lieberthal, while our staff also often went to the US Embassy or the MFA for seminars, with communications mainly focused on hot issues of Sino-American relations. After the 9/11 event, owing to factors like the outburst of the Iraq war, I personally paid less attention to Sino-American relations and in 2005 left the US Institute. Generally speaking, there is a mutual link between how to judge the US and how to evaluate Sino-American relations. I fear that this is a kind of social responsibility that the US Institute cannot disregard; undertaking the responsibility is its duty. You want decisions put out for some of the big issues? You want someone to clearly say what, in fact, the US's strengths are? The characteristics of Sino-American relations? The development direction of the US? The development direction of Sino-American relations? These are the responsibilities of the US Institute.

Q: After you came to the US Institute, Sino-American relations experienced several twists and turns or crises. The US Institute, owing to its social responsibility, also participated in many domestic seminars discussing US policies. What effect or influence did this have on the Institute?

A: The first effect was that you could no longer say that the US Institute wasn't important. For instance, after the end of 2003, the central government leaders put

forward the request to study the subject of US-Soviet striving for hegemony and its historical lessons. CASS had to rely on the US Institute and the Russian, Eastern Europe and Central Asian Institutes. The US Institute joined this research project and I wrote the general report. Conversely, mainly because of these seminars, research tasks and societal need, the US Institute could not not get involved. Of course I do have personal interests in the research mentioned, but to a great extent, it is because there is a social need. It can be said that there's always someone who is interested in US affairs since they are more eye-catching than matters in other countries. There was a large audience at the time when we set up *American Panorama*. Therefore, as long as you are in the US Institute, you will not be idle. If you are idle, it can only mean that you yourself have problems.

Q: How do Americans in the US look upon the US's relative decline in position? What should outside researchers or observers be sure to pay attention to?

A: Americans in the US have a lot of different opinions and perspectives when looking upon their own country. I wrote an article in 1997 entitled "In High Places You Cannot Bear the Cold", which preliminarily discussed America's world position and function. Although this problem has something to do with Sino-American relations, you cannot start your study from Sino-American relations. There're a lot of people commenting on the US, but the Americans themselves comment the most. As to their judgment on the rise and fall of the US, I think the mainstream view is that the US didn't and will not decline. The 20th century was America's century and so is the 21st. Many Americans are quite confident on this. However, there are many more Americans who are unsatisfied with the US and think it is worse than in the past, what with the country running into many problems and crises, such as the status of US dollar, the financial crisis, the decline of domestic cohesion, polarization of politics, control of domestic monopoly groups, etc.

Enraged people, relatively leftist people, put the responsibility onto the heads of big American monopolies (such as petroleum companies and the George W. Bush administration which supported them). You can always hear these voices. But rarely or never will Americans think the systems of other countries are better than that of their own. Basically Americans believe that there are no big problems within their own systems. If there are any issues, they will overcome them and there is no need to make great adjustments to their basic systems and values. They will delve deeply to thoroughly expose America's malpractices, but generally speaking, they are progressive people; they are a relatively self-confident people.

Concerning the relative decline in the US's position, some Americans are somewhat impatient to see improvement and some have a feeling of fear and sense of crisis. If we say that the current decline of the US's position differs from the past, then it is principally from the impact of the financial crisis. This crisis makes the American feel that there're deep contradictions inside America's economy and that the crisis'

explosion was not random but caused by a series of factors, for instance, the real estate bubble. For the Americans, you can say it was rooted in Wall Street's greed or loss of control in financial supervision. In short, it was because America was too "right" leaning; there is no problem with the market economy itself, but rather Wall Street is not transparent enough and there exist problems like excessive consumption.

The international financial crisis that started in 2008 had a big effect on Americans' worries, making them feel that they had to reassess their own economic system and entire economic structure. If economic theory takes over too much of the basis for running the actual total economy, then the economy will decline, which will damage the power of the US at a fundamental level. It is worth reflecting upon. However, the Americans think these problems can be overcome, or that a larger transformation – for instance, a revolution or upheaval – is necessary to trigger adjustments to their existing internal systems.

Rarely will Americans say that their capitalism is dying and will give way to socialism. Never will Americans say that they need to learn from others because the basic systems of other countries are better. Americans usually say they will take other countries' experiences as references. For instance, President Obama mentioned China many times in his 2011 State of the Union Address, stating that if the US does not work hard, they will fall behind China. The reason President Obama, people around Obama, and people who have good relations with Obama, like my friend Thomas Friedman, mention China is that they want to motivate the Americans. For example, they talk about how strict China's education is, how much better Chinese primary students are at math, how fast China's economy developed and how it will catch up with the US soon, how China's soft power is growing, and how China uses its charm to draw Africa to its side. Hillary Clinton said China started a diplomatic offensive in East Asia, therefore the State Department has a lot more work to do and Congress needs to provide more money. All this is done to motivate the US. They spoke of the relative decline of the US's position, bringing about a feeling of crisis. But this is just motivation; it does not mean that, in the bottom of their hearts, they actually think the US is in trouble. It is a patriotic attitude of trying to improve oneself and overcome one's weaknesses, not a pessimistic and depressed attitude.

I believe that the discussion about the fall of the US will last for many years, continuing until it actually falls. But currently I don't foresee any long-term trend of the US starting to go downhill. I can use a metaphor here: the development of the US has already reached a summit and it cannot go any higher. This summit is in comparison to other countries; it cannot be surpassed again because it is already the top. Starting from the Clinton period, from the end of last century to the beginning of this century, the relative power of the US within the world reached a peak. Since then, it has started to go downward. However, this summit is not a pinnacle, but a flat-topped hill. There are low-lying areas on the top; therefore, sometimes the US will go upward and

sometimes downward. We cannot currently foresee when America will come to the end of the flat top, fall down, and become unable to rise again. But this will surely happen one day. Just as humans are born, grow old, become sick, and ultimately die [mortality], countries are the same: they rise and then fall. As it is said in ***Hongloumeng (A Dream of Red Mansions)***, “largeness has large difficulties, there are no feasts which are everlasting; these are the laws of history.”

Concerning the relative decline of the US position, there is a new factor different from the previous debates, and that is the sudden rise of China. When in undergraduate and postgraduate studies, people discussed the declining power of the US with the background of the US-Soviet striving for hegemony. Some people forecasted that the annual rate of increase for the Soviet economy was 5%, while for the US it was 2% or 3%. In that view, arriving at the end of the 20th century, the Soviet Union would overtake the US and become a superpower even stronger than the US. Yet this debate did not last long, since the Soviet Union declined and finally collapsed. No one had ever thought that would happen. In 1987 when the Soviet Union showed signs of falling, Paul Kennedy mentioned China in his famous book ***The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers***, but his focus was discourse on Japan and West Germany (later Germany). He and others estimated that Japan might first surpass the US in GDP per capita, then soon after in overall GDP, setting the time at the end of the 20th century/beginning of the 21st century. The result was that Japan’s economy stalled after 1990. The US became the only one superpower and at that time, there seemed to be not a single country able to challenge the US’s absolute leading position in the foreseeable future.

But today it is different. The reason why the Americans have started to discuss the US’s relatively declining position in 2011 is that China, together with many other developing countries – including India, Brazil and Russia – is rising and forming a new challenge to the US position. At this time, if we study America, we cannot only study the country of America alone. When we previously debated the position of the US, we compared the US with developed countries like Japan and Germany. Now it is different. China is a developing country and a socialist country led by the Communist Party. The development of China, regardless of whether it surpasses the US in power or overall economy, alerts the world: *are* the US systems definitely better/stronger than those in China? Or, will the development of Chinese-style socialism reach an end in the capitalist dominated world? This leads to deep speculation. Competition in our current world is not only competition among capitalist countries. The world is more optimistic about China, India and Brazil. To some extent the above list may include Russia (I say this because Russia suffered a lot from this financial crisis and its economy mainly relied on export, so many people are not optimistic about it). The power gap between these countries and the US is lessening. Today’s comparison may include two aspects: one is comparing the US to its past; and the other is comparing the US to the rising developing countries. If comparing the US to Europe and Japan, the result is fairly definite. Even though the developing power of the whole

European Union together is unequal to America today, the EU is not one country. The power of the entire developed world, commonly referred to as the Western countries (Japan, Europe, plus North America, Australia and New Zealand), is declining. This is an indisputable fact. Comparing single countries – the UK, France, Germany and Japan – to the US, the gap is not reducing, but increasing. Therefore, the overall position of the US in the world is not obviously declining. Much further progress on analyses regarding this matter can still be made.

It is indisputable that the US reached its heyday after the end of WWII. At that time, the gross industrial output value of the US was nearly 1/2 of that of the whole world. Every country was damaged in the war, and only the US made a fortune through the war. The economic power of the Soviet Union was at most 1/3 of the US's. Therefore that period cannot be discussed as a bipolar world; it was not until the 1960s to 1970s that we arrived at a bipolar world. The US today cannot return to that period. But after WWII, there was a period (mainly the Nixon and Carter governments) when the US world position was even weaker than it is today. All kinds of data show that the US came across a series of problems. At that time, the ratio of the total economy of the US to the world was about 22% or even lower. Moreover, there was the petroleum crisis, Vietnam War consumption, domestic anti-war sentiment, the Black Civil Rights movement, the hostage crisis at US Embassy in Iran, and so on, which made the world look down upon the US slightly. Some Chinese commented that Nixon's State of the Union Address title was a hopeless self-confession. There was also a book reflecting the history of those days called *The Glory and the Dream*. It seemed that the American dream was shattered. During Carter's time, the Iran hostage crisis lasted more than 400 days, which made Americans feel embarrassed and the world position of the US dropped significantly; moreover, the Soviet Union was there. Even in the western world, the US was looked down upon. Nowadays the US power is greatly strengthened compared to that period. No matter if one is referring to comparative power or absolute power, both have strengthened greatly. Yet if compared to the time just after the end of WWII, the US's position has declined a lot. Therefore when we observe the US, we need to consider a long historical period, which may start from the Roosevelt era. Only after we combine this relatively long historical track with the track of the history of world development and the rise and fall of great powers can we make an initial observation or conclusion.

Our problem lies in that some people often draw conclusions too rashly, frequently relying on one event at one time. For instance, after the 9/11 event, they thought the US was ruined from then on. Now there's the Libya crisis and the US can do nothing about it, so therefore the US is again ruined. It is the same when they judge the financial crisis. Concerning studies on the rise and fall of the US, I think there're a lot of issues to be discussed, but what I'd like to say here is that no matter the domestic researchers or our overall public opinions, we've spent too many decades underestimating and playing down the US and we have been proved wrong by the facts many times. Sometimes it is an emotion mixed into research or judgment: I don't

like the US and therefore I don't like to say that the US is powerful. Now, apart from the Americans themselves, only some scholars say that the US is fine; while many more foreign statesmen will say that the US is not OK. Of those who say the US is declining, most do not base their opinions on objective analysis, but on political considerations. If you want to make relatively accurate, basic judgments on the rise and fall of the US, you cannot judge from public opinions. You need to analyze from the track of development historically and establish some standards. For instance, under what criteria is a [country's] rise determined? Under what criteria is a decline determined? Which countries and periods do we compare the US to? Some things, for example, soft power, are difficult to judge and should be analyzed according to country or area. Concerning soft power, the US influence in some countries and areas is declining, while in some others it is increasing. Therefore they all require individual analysis.

Q: Are there any criterions to judge the rise and fall of the US?

A: I'd like to emphasize that we need to pay attention to two criteria: first, how did the US become powerful and have the factors that made the US strong changed? If these factors are still the same or haven't experienced obvious change, the US will remain powerful and we cannot easily say that the US is declining. This criterion involves academic analysis. Second, the direction of talent flow. This is a very intuitive criterion. Professor Zi Zhongyun also mentioned this many times. When students around the world stop putting the US as their top study abroad preference, when immigrants stop choosing the US as their ultimate destination, when there is hardly anyone waiting outside the US embassies and consulates to apply for visas, it will really mean that the US is declining. That is not presently the case. Students of Tsinghua or Peking Universities still want to study in America's famous universities. If you could choose between Harvard and Moscow University, or between Ohio and Cairo University, where would you go? Everyone seems to know this well and are using their feet to vote. Although people think that the US has this or that problem, they can still live a comfortable life, show their creative talents, initiate their own careers, send money home and live a better life in the US. It is just like people's feelings toward Beijing. You can say there are a lot of problems in Beijing – housing, transportation, medical care, etc. – but why there are still so many non-locals running to live in Beijing and striving for a Beijing hukou? These lines of thinking are the same. In fact, it is not only in China, it is also true for people in every other country in the world. No matter whether you are a scientist, technician, intellectual or a young common worker, you are convinced that you want to go to the US, even though you might not understand America well. European, African, Middle Eastern, Japanese, South Korean and Southeast Asian all think the same. They believe that if they want to seize knowledge, master a talent, and create a better life, the US should be their first choice. As long as this situation remains the same, the US will not decline. Therefore, if you keep the above two criteria in mind, you will know how to judge the

rise and fall of the US.

As for the factors supporting and enabling the US's strength, I've summed up the following (the order is not important):

1. The tradition and spirit of the rule of law. This is a very important factor that unites the US. The reason why the US is so powerful relates closely to the rule of law. I once wrote an article discussing the difference between "rule of law" and "rule by law". When saying "rule of law", the law is the subject and it means that it is the law that is running the country. "Rule by law" actually includes rule by man because it means some group rules the country by law. As to whom those people are and why they have the right to run the country is not of concern. Rule of law is the root from which the US runs itself.
2. Simple values or ideology. The ideology of the US can be described clearly in just several sentences: the US value is a circle, or scientifically speaking, a closed loop which forms an independent system of its own. The things that make up this ideology can be explained together as mutual parts. Starting from freedom, plus democracy, human rights, market economy and the rule of law, these constitute a set of rings linked together. These kinds of simple mainstream values never change; further, they unite the Americans and will not change in the foreseeable future. Not a single American doubts those mainstream values or advocates studying another set of values. Moreover, American values are related to religion. They do have multiple religious beliefs, but basically Protestantism is still the mainstream faith.
3. A complete system of technical innovation and system innovation. The US is an innovative country which will always encourage people to innovate. Up to now its innovation dynamic is far from being exhausted. Moreover, there are still a lot of people living the American dream and people from other countries would still like to go to the US to blaze new innovative trails. Professor Zi Zhongyun wrote many articles about this topic; for instance, the system of foundations/endowed institutions as a kind of innovation.
4. The existence of a civil society and the quality of its citizens. The relation between the US as a nation and its society is relatively unique. The society has great cohesion and innovation abilities, while the rights of the nation or government are limited according to the law. You could say that the power of society is greater than that of the government. When taking part in seminars held in the US, the Americans can say that they do not represent the government and they can criticize the government and George W. Bush, yet they are using the value system of American liberalism to judge. Although we might think that the American leftists, including Chomsky, are very left-leaning, when analyzing their views or comments, we will discover that they are using the same basic value system to criticize the US government and that is why they are dissatisfied. But when the Americans use this value system to evaluate other countries, they will

become even more dissatisfied. You can say that they are non-governmental or even anti-government or anti-system, but these people are still Americans after all is said and done. Their existence benefits the US and strengthens the soft power and attraction of the US. Because of the existence of these people, people think that the US is diverse, rich and colorful, and that anyone can become influential in the US. Consequently, they want to go to America and they don't think the US is bad simply because others are criticizing it.

5. The US is exceptionally rich in natural resources and conditions, and no other country can compare to it in that respect. It is a country surrounded by two oceans, with Canada to its north and Mexico and the various Caribbean nations to its south; no one can bully America. In addition to its geographic environment, the US is also very rich in natural resources, such as mine and land resources.

The above 1-4 items together are the basic factors that make the US powerful and, up until now, these factors haven't fundamentally changed. The last item is an innate gift of natural resources. If someone said that the creative ability of the US has been exhausted and that the US will collapse and never recover, I would respond that it is too early to say that. I'm afraid that the US is far from reaching that point.

Q: For the above 1-4 factors, could we sum them up as a system [of factors]?

A : Yes, we could say that. Americans think that their country's system has a lot of disadvantages, but none of them think the systems of other countries are better or that they should learn from another country's systems. If we define system broadly, then the above 4 factors can be included. Many problems have emerged in the US, but none of the Americans will say that the US needs to change from rule of law to rule by man. No one will say that the US doesn't need innovation and that it should instead get intellectual property from other countries and plagiarize their technology. The innovation ability of the US is nearly endless. The reason why it leads in science and technology is that it relies on all kinds of specific systems, for instance the human talent system. Further, its talent system is not dominated by the government and the primary goal is to create favorable conditions to nurture talent. Talents are not cultivated by one organization; rather, they will grow naturally if adequate conditions are provided. When I was in the US Institute, I often said we should create a relaxed and comfortable environment instead of focusing thoughts on who would be the next academic director or next head of the Institute. Whichever researcher wanted to do something, he would be able to do it and we would support him.

Q: What do you think the most competent researchers pay attention to when studying the US?

A: I think grasping the distinguishing features of the US. What I mentioned above are all features of the US different from other countries. However, when we study the US,

we cannot stare at the US alone. For instance, when we study American politics, we should understand world politics, at the very least having some knowledge about it! When we study American culture, we should have a grasp of basic knowledge about the history of world civilization and the development of American culture. I don't agree with the formulation of American studies as a separate discipline. We should divide disciplines by categories of political science, economics, sociology, etc. American Studies requires comprehensive research and basic knowledge of multiple disciplines.

The feature most worthy of our attention is the relation between diversity and unity. The US is full of all kinds of contradictions. What is the relation between the various cultures and the mainstream culture? How about the market and the government? What are the differences between the US market economy from those in Germany, Japan and France? What are the concrete differences within US enterprises? How is America's basic ideology formed? What are the methods used in the US to unite the whole nation?

I argued with one economist a few days ago. He said it's impossible to have one idea, one common purpose. I told him that the US has done it. However, the US did not use force, but rather did it little by little naturally and formed a unified system of values. For instance, were either Saddam or Gadhafi good men? Perhaps no American would say they were good men. Americans would say they don't like those guys, but as to how to deal with them, everyone would have different opinions. That is to say, the basic judgment would be the same, but reasoning leading to policy could differ.

When we study the US, we need to pay attention to its internals. If we don't have a general understanding of American politics, economics, society, culture, military disciplines, and so on, we have no way to judge America's external actions, let alone comment on its rise and decline. The US can be summed up into many features, and every one of them is worth studying. There are many reasons why the US has become what it is today and there are still many details that need to be studied, for example, its immigration policy. There are a lot of immigrants in the US, but why is the situation better than in Europe? America's composition of immigrant ethnicities is very complicated, yet why hasn't there been national division? Also, how are the US universities managed? What are the educational ideologies of the universities? What are the universities' systems for managing talent? For example, how are academic titles conferred?

Q: Can we put it this way: in order to study the internals of the US, we need to understand its basic systems first and the basic systems contain many detailed subsystems which cannot be ignored as well?

A: Yes, it can be understood that way. We know little about many details which really need to be figured out, such as the US taxation system. It cannot be made clear through reading a book. America's taxation system is very complicated and is a

headache to many people. Americans don't have ID cards. They only have drivers' licenses and passports when they go abroad. Of course, they do have personal social security numbers. But how does the US manage to ensure that no one will escape taxes? Starting from taxes, we can conduct a lot of research. Moreover, what relates to concretely to us are America's think tanks. How do these organizations import talent? What is the criterion? Do they recruit openly or by recommendations? What kind of people can make recommendations and what is the procedure? What is the structure of the Brookings Institution? I once went to Rand Corporation to find Jonathon Pollack, who was responsible for scientific research management at that time. He told me in detail about the management of Rand. They had more than 600 scientific researchers then, but they didn't have political or economic departments and, unlike us, they didn't distinguish between research departments within the institution. Their departments were all abstract and they managed these 600+ people directly. Jonathon Pollack introduced in detail how their funds were applied and controlled, how to calculate the work load of each researcher per year, who the secretaries were, where the assistants came from, etc. It was very complicated. In a word, they had one complete, quite meticulous management system. There are a few books on America's think tanks published in China, but they don't introduce the detailed systems or internal relations of those think tanks.

Q: What basic principles do you think Chinese researchers must master when they study America?

A: First, before observing the external actions of the US, they should observe the internals of the nation. One must conduct deep and careful studies on America's internal situation. This is something we should do, yet we fail to do it well. When we observe the US, basically we look from the outside. For instance, after Obama was elected as President, some people started to guess what policies Obama would take towards China instead of starting analysis from conditions within the US.

Second, we cannot use political ethics to make simple judgments, or in other words, we should try to reduce the influence of moral judgments in politics on objective analysis. You can have your own political ethical judgments on the US, saying it is an imperialist country, an evil country or whatever. But this is a judgment on political morals and should not affect your analysis. You cannot say that the US is declining simply because you don't like it or vice versa. You cannot allow your emotion to affect objective academic analysis. Some people think that the US is a country with racial and gender discriminations, therefore blacks and women absolutely cannot become president. Yet within the candidates of the last American election in the Democratic Party, there was one African American and one woman. Obama's victory overturned this view. This is how America is. After Obama was elected, there were some people who forecasted that Obama would soon be assassinated because Americans would never accept a black president. This judgment was based on our own subjective preferences or shallow impressions. And this kind of problem exists when we study

America or even international problems. We should avoid this kind of deviation. We always criticize the US for using its own political morals to judge others and we should avoid similar problems ourselves. Therefore, you should try to observe the US and figure it out by perspective that is not completely Chinese. You may not like the US, but you need to study and understand it.

Third, you should experience the US and not just totally rely on books. Regrettably, what we know about the US is mainly from books. You must visit the US and live there for a period of time! For instance, if you want to study American think tanks, you need to visit them and do field interviews. American scholars studying China, like Kenneth Lieberthal, came to China and conducted interviews instead of reading *People's Daily* or *Global Times* every day. Experiencing the real US is one basic principle of studying America. You can improve your knowledge about America by interviews and field visits. What if this cannot be done? Then you should watch something live. For instance, video and the Internet are now so advanced that you can see many things. You can also establish communication with Americans. Even if you send an email to an American VIP, you may get a reply.

Fourth, you need to read original materials in English including film and TV resources. The information in books already lags behind and if you still read them in Chinese, then that is a level below second hand. The basic English skills of many Chinese are not good and translations are bad as well. If you quote their sentences, it will be terrible. I do it like this: if I want to quote any information in Chinese, as long as I can refer to its original text, I will do so; and I would never let go of any of the original notes because translated versions are too unreliable. There are some people who study the US and make comments just by reading *Reference News* and *Global Times*. And they usually draw resolute and definite conclusions much more than I.

The above are basic requirements. If you want to study Sino-American relations, at least one half of the knowledge is on the American side, i.e. you need to study the US. There are many articles right now about the US on many large websites, but a lot are looking through events and incidents towards the nature or basic quality of the stories, focusing on one point without taking care of the others, first drawing a conclusion and then hunting for supporting evidence. It is the same in many books. The writers always believe that if you want to know specific things about the US, it's enough for you to read just one specific book, as if the level of a Chinese person's achievement were manifested in excellent summarizing ability.

Q: In order to further understand the US, does it mean that the researchers should pay attention to some very basic details instead of pondering on big subjects? As it is said "many grains of sand piled up will make a pagoda". Will attention to detail contribute to the study of the US's internal situation?

A: Yes. Concerning the present status of China's American studies, frankly speaking, it is worse than what I predicted when I first entered the US Institute. With the

increase in national power and the growth of the younger generation's scientific research strength, the research achievement should have improved. However, it is a pity that the quantity and the quality of actual research achievement are improving slowly and, in some areas, it's even falling behind. This doesn't correspond with China's increasing national power, our resources, or the needs of our society. Then why did this happen? I thought about this when I was the director of the US Institute and chairman of Institute of American Studies. I think it is due to the following reasons, some of which can be overcome and some of which cannot be.

1. Not enough investment in the nation and society. No matter whether it is the study of international problems or the US, which we think is top priority, the nation's investment is not enough. For instance, if we need to go to the US to study its think tanks, the work unit can provide funds to send a group or a person, but what about the investment of the nation as a whole?
2. Direction of research topics. For many years, we had many subjects whose topics and range were very broad. The direction was focused heavily on policy and was light on the foundational basis, or heavy on macros and light on micros. We should be able to change this situation, but in the foreseeable future, it is difficult to do so. For those endless subjects, the nation spends a lot every year, while in the end, what result in American studies do we ultimately get? It is not optimistic. And the following two reasons are inevitable within the field of American studies.
3. The position of American studies has experienced a relative decline. First, when the US Institute for American studies was first opened, the needs of the nation and aspirations of the people were quite different. At that time, the whole nation put forward the aim of realizing modernization and people believed that we must learn from what the US had experienced. But now our opinions about the US have changed. Our views about the US changed and the America in our hearts changed as well. Second, there is a rise of importance for the studies of other countries and regions, which is a good thing. From the 1970s to 1990s, we had deep interest in American studies. We studied very little about other countries or regions, because we had less interest in them and lacked contact [or access]. Now, China has developed its relations with other countries and areas and our interest in Middle East, Latin America and African countries has increased as their importance [in the world] has also become clear. For this reason the allocation of research funds to American studies is comparatively less. Third, there are more and more discussions of functional topics, for instance, energy problems, financial problems, international systems, climate change problems. All of these problems are inevitably linked to the US, yet they do not belong to any part of American studies. The researchers of these problems will not list American studies as their main research direction or purpose. Finally, the number of professional researchers for American studies decreased, or at least did not increase. Thirty years ago, professional researchers for international problems were separated according to their target countries, not by functional topics. Now it is different. The overall number of the people who regard American studies as

their professional direction is not rising; at least, the number of people in the US Institute remains the same. Consequently it is difficult to improve the quantity and quality of achievements [in American studies].

4. No support from the Americans. I had personal experiences of this. When I first became director of the US Institute and started setting up American studies, Americans were interested in Chinese studying the US and supported us warmly. At that time they wanted to teach you and felt that [Chinese people] really didn't understand the US. They provided us with all kinds of resources, including audiovisual products and more. But now their interest has steeply declined. Today they come to China for the purpose of understanding China. They urge Chinese to go to the US to study about China, not to study about America. I talked about this problem with Julia Chang Bloch who is zealously promoting American studies in China. I told her that first the Americans don't support American studies; second, even if they offer support, it is focused on Sino-American relations. If we want to apply funds from American foundations for studying US think tanks, they will not give you money. But if we say we would like to study a Chinese minority population, Americans will immediately provide money. This change in Americans has happened gradually. In the wake of China's rise, Americans have become more interested in China and therefore they are not as enthusiastic about the Chinese studying America. And if you try to research a politically sensitive issue, they are very on guard. Of course Americans are selfish and I am criticizing them a lot and saying a lot about this. But who is not selfish? It is no use complaining to the Americans. We can only put forth a great effort by ourselves.

Q: What are the messages or expectations you would like to convey to the young generation of researchers in the US Institute?

A: Under the present objective environment, younger people should take the initiative to create opportunities and conditions, e.g. going abroad. They need to actively apply for research projects and do well on these projects. At the same time, they should enhance their independence and initiative. They should reflect on their independence and explore research topics. Now the environment is quite loose and they can study whatever subjects they like, which has already been great. But if they do not have basic skills, they can never do anything. For instance, their English ability should reach communication level, including writing ability. If your English is not good enough, no one will talk to you. When we say someone's English is good, the final standard is his writing ability. So the most foundational thing they can do is to strengthen their English as it relates to the study and use of their knowledge.