

The Story of CAAPA

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Creating the Association

CAAPA stands for “China-America Association for Public Affairs” (hereafter as “the Association”). This name was adopted in 2008; the original name was “Chinese-in-America Association for Public Affairs”. Both versions of the name carry the same acronym, CAAPA, by design, because it has been widely accepted as a “trademark” among our partners in China and the US. The Association was initiated in the fall of 1998 at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs of Syracuse University. In that summer, Yilin made a trip back to China and visited Tsinghua University. In meetings with a few university leaders and the Preparatory Leadership Group for the forthcoming School of Public Policy and Management (SPPM), Yilin suggested that Tsinghua establish a Public Affairs School and that in the U.S. an association would be created to promote academic support and exchanges with the new field of Public Administration in China.

Back at Maxwell, Yilin and Caroline Tong (then manager of the China Program at the Executive Education Program of Maxwell) discussed and made the initiation to William Sullivan (then director of the Executive Education Program) and got his immediate, full support. The word of such an association spread within Maxwell and won support from Dean John Palmer, PA Department head and associate dean Astrid Merget, and some faculty members who had been keen on international cooperation. The idea was to create an association of scholars who were born, brought up and educated in China and then came to the United States for Ph.D. degrees in public administration, public policy and related fields. The Association would engage in research and academic exchanges between the two countries to promote PA development in China and the understanding of China affairs by American scholars. The idea of the Association gradually but steadily spread among Chinese PhD students at PA schools across the U.S. and a network formed over a few years; real operation started from late 2002.

In the spring of 2003, Yilin Hou, Caroline Tong and Yonghong Wu finalized the details of the Association which was put into a set of “Operations Guidelines”. The initial name was the “Chinese-in-America Association for Public Affairs” because the Association was assumed to be mainly of Chinese scholars who either have studied or are teaching and conducting research in America in areas of public administration and more inclusive, public affairs. In the following three years, the Association ran on a regular basis, governed by a BOARD with James Chan, Alfred Ho, Yilin Hou, Jun Ma, Caroline Tong, Wen Wang, Jiannan Wu, Yonghong Wu, and Zhibin Zhang. The Association had around 30 active members. In 2007, a website was created (www.caapa-us.org), supported and funded by the Executive Education Program of the Maxwell School. Wen Wang was the first webmaster.

After a few years of successful operation, CAAPA was ready for an official status. The Board decided to revise and convert the original “guidelines” into a formal “charter” of the Association; Alfred Ho took lead in this effort. The Board also changed the Association’s name to “China-America Association for Public Affairs” to be inclusive of American PA scholars who are keenly interested in China affairs. CAAPA then was registered in the state of Georgia as a

non-profit organization. Yonghong Wu, Zhirong Zhao and Wen Wang prepared documents; Yilin Hou filed to the Internal Revenue Service; and the Association obtained tax-exempt status as a (501C3) public charities organization, effective from April 2008. After months of preparation, an open election was conducted in January 2009 via email by an independent three-person committee (James Chan-chair, Irene Rubin and William Sullivan); the results were then published. CAAPA thereby finished every step in its institutional establishment.

Missions of the Association

The Association, from its original “Operations Guidelines” upholds two missions. The first is to focus on research: as trained scholars, members are to conduct research relevant to the PA field in the US and China, to engage in academic exchange activities revolving around research, and to stay away from any commercial and/or publicity efforts. The second is to promote, through our own research and exchanges, the dialogue between scholars in China and the U.S., the development of public administration research and education in China, and the enrichment of public administration research in the U.S. In the past few years the Association has stayed true to these two core missions and won recognition and support for its activities among academia.

The revised charter stays close to the original language by stating that the Association is for “advancing the science, processes, and art of public administration and public affairs in China” and for “promoting research and academic exchanges between American and Chinese researchers, teachers, practitioners, and students of public administration and public affairs.” To be more comprehensive, the charter specifies that the Association will work on research, professional development, cooperative relationships, and publications and communications.

Accomplishments So Far

The Association’s first activity was a panel on “public budgeting in China” at the 2003 annual conference of the Association for Budgeting and Financial Management (ABFM). The panel included four papers, by Wilson Wong (1998 Maxwell PhD, Chinese University of Hong Kong), Jun Ma (2002 PhD Nebraska-Omaha, Sun Yat-sen University, China), Mengzhong Zhang (who was finishing his PhD at Rutgers-Newark), and Yilin Hou (2002 Maxwell PhD, University of Georgia). Prof. Thomas P. Lauth, dean at the School of Public and International Affairs of the University of Georgia was the moderator and Prof. Irene S. Rubin was the discussant. The China panel was a great success; it attracted many Chinese scholars at the conference. The four papers later came out as a symposium in the *Journal of Public Budgeting Accounting and Financial Management*, Volume 18, Issue 4 (November 2006).

In the summer of 2004, the Association reached agreement for cooperation with the School of Politics and Government, Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, China (where Jun Ma was then an associate dean) and the School of Public Management, Xi’an Jiaotong University in Xi’an, China (where Jiannan Wu was an associate dean). In June 2005, a joint conference on budget reform was held at Sun Yat-sen University, with participation and financial support from Guangdong Provincial Government. Immediately following the Guangzhou event, a joint symposium on government performance was held at Xi’an Jiaotong University. These kicked off our annual conference series.

The May 2006 joint conferences were on “Institutional Innovation and Governance Capacity” and “Public Budgeting and Governance Capacity”, respectively. The first was between CAAPA and the Central University of Finance and Economics, held at the Friendship Hotel in Beijing. The CAAPA group had eight members from the U.S., who were joined by several dozen scholars from universities and government institutions within China. The second was between CAAPA and SYSU, held in Guangzhou.

The joint conference moved to Shanghai in 2007 (June), between CAAPA and the School of International Relations and Public Affairs of Fudan University; the theme was “public finance and government reform”. Then the CAAPA group went to Beijing for a lecture series on public finance and budgeting at the Central University of Finance and Economics.

In December 2008, the CAAPA went back to Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou; the joint conference was on “rebuilding China’s administrative state”. The Association took on a new partner, School of Public Affairs, Xiamen University in Xiamen, China. The joint conference in Xiamen was on the development and paradigms of public administration education and research in China, with participants from all over China and officials from the Chinese National Science Foundation.

On academic publication, CAAPA and the Center for Public Administration Research at Sun Yat-sen University co-edit a journal *Public Management Research* (as a book series). Jun Ma and Yilin Hou are the co-editors. By now, three issues have come out. For the promotion of exchanges between scholars of the two countries, CAAPA has brought distinguished American scholars to China over the years, including John Bartle, Jonathan Breul, John Bryson, William Duncombe, Bart Hildreth, Philip Joyce, James Perry, Irene Rubin, Jeffrey Straussman, and Thomas Lauth.

We Can Achieve More

Yes, we have done a lot; but that is only a beginning. The Association has become increasingly more aware of the need for closer collaboration between its members and between Chinese and American schools of public affairs and scholars. CAAPA is willing and happy to be a bridge and a facilitator for more and greater achievements in research and exchanges.