

China's First Annual Conference on Socio-Legal Studies Held in Shanghai

Weidong Ji*

Shanghai Jiao Tong University, KoGuan Law School

On 29 and 30 July 2016, about 200 scholars working in the disciplines of law and social sciences (many of whom are well-known experts) and more than 60 graduate students from all over China (some from Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as Canada, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, Singapore, and the US) gathered at the beautiful Xuhui campus of Shanghai Jiao Tong University to attend the nationwide First Annual Conference of Socio-Legal Studies in China. “New Visions of Law and Society” was the theme of the conference, which received strong support from the China Law Society and its Shanghai division. The conference was co-hosted by the Shanghai Association of Law and Society (established in July 2014 and first chaired by Professor Ji Weidong) and the editorial board of the preeminent Chinese academic journal *China Social Science*, and was organized by the KoGuan Law School of Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

At the opening session, speeches were given by Professor Zhang Jie, a Member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) and President of Shanghai Jiao Tong University; Mr Li Hongyan, the Deputy Chief Editor of *China Social Science*; Mr Lin Guoping, the Deputy President of the Shanghai Law Society; and Mr Zhang Mingqi, Deputy President of the China Law Society. Professor Lawrence Friedman of Stanford Law School, an internationally renowned scholar of law and society, expressed his congratulations via video. After that, Professor Zhu Jingwen, of Renmin University Law School, and Professor Ji Weidong, of KoGuan Law School, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, delivered keynote speeches entitled “Standards and Data Analysis of the Assessment of the Rule of Law in China” and “Decision-making Procedure and Legal Communication in a Risk Society,” respectively. In the following roundtable discussion, eight scholars from related fields—Professors Cheng Jinhua, Qi Haibin, Ge Hongyi, Zuo Weimin, Zheng Yongliu, Wang Yaxin, Hou Meng, and Liu Sida—presented an overview of the history of the law and society movement in China, analyzed current trends, and speculated on future developments and tendencies.

The conference received more than 200 papers from scholars of diverse colleges and research institutions, such as Peking University, Tsinghua University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Zhejiang University, Fudan University, Renmin University, Wuhan University, Xiamen University, Jilin University, Zhongshan University, Sichuan University, China University of Political Science and Law, East China University of Political Science and Law, Southwest University of Political Science and Law, and Zhongnan University of Economics

* Chair Professor and Dean of the KoGuan Law School of Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

and Law. Among these, more than 80 were selected for presentation. The two-day conference was divided into 12 specific sessions, including “Disciplinary Construction and Methodological Issues of Law and Society,” “Dialogues between Legal Dogmatism and Legal Sociology around the Draft Civil Code,” “State Governance in a Risk Society and Innovation of the Legal Paradigms,” “Public Law, Theory and Sociology of Law,” “Legal Profession, Judicial Institution and Its Reform,” “Empirical Studies in Legal Institutions,” “Social Transformation, Disputes and their Resolution,” and “Legal Behavioral Study and Cognitive Neuroscience.” Two “Young Scholar Panels” were also organized as separate sessions. Every session included vigorous discussions, even fierce debates, while the conference as a whole maintained an atmosphere of conviviality ideal for knowledge exchange. Especially important was attendance by legal practitioners, such as judges, attorneys, and other specialists in legal interpretation interested or well versed in the legal-social methodology. They came from various cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Ningbo, to participate in the discussions, which contributed to the expansion of the cross-disciplinary and cross-sectorial influences of the law and society research paradigm.

After dinner on the 29th, Professor Ji Weidong presided over an academic salon regarding cross-border co-ordination in law and society studies, in which approximately 70 scholars of all ages participated. The salon focused on methods of organizing socio-legal studies in China, international communication and co-operation, and the 2017 International Meeting on Law and Society (a joint meeting with Law and Society Association (LSA) and Research Committee on Sociology of Law (RCSL) to be held in Mexico City). The salon participants decided to publish a collection of papers from the conference, organize special topical issues for several academic periodicals, and formulate three policy proposals—relating to Civil Codification, judicial reform, and grassroots organizations—to submit to relevant state authorities.

Another goal of the First Annual Conference of Socio-Legal Studies in China was establishing a large-scale platform for cross-disciplinary communication and co-operation, to integrate the accumulated resources of China’s socio-legal studies over the past 30 years, forming a nationwide research network and establishing a Chinese Law and Society Association within the China Law Society. Toward these ends, the conference was open to the media. Both newspapers and TV stations covered the conference and publicized the event on a national scale, including coverage by the Xinhua News Agency, Guangming Daily, Legal Daily, Wenhui News, China Social Science News, and Xinmin Evening News. Many participants noted that conferences of similar scale and quality within legal studies specifically and social sciences in general were relatively rare in the past ten years: not many conferences in these fields had comparably abundant content, attractive topics, and vigorous debates. Hence, the conference established a precedent, and the “law and society” movement in China is poised to chart new academic territory, building up efficient organizations and institutions in its path to establish independent disciplinary status.

