Public Opinion Reform in China

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Public Opinion and Reform in China

by David S. Mason and Ken Colburn, Butler University

As the People's Republic of China shifts toward a more market-oriented economic system, it has also begun exploring another Western institution: scientific public opinion polling. As Yang Guansan, one of China's leading pollsters, said recently in the *Beijing Review*: "Only five or six years ago, the public opinion poll was considered to be a 'bourgeois' or 'capitalist' method of social survey... Now the taboo has been swept away in the strong tide of reform, which is challenging all of China's traditions, stereotypes and prejudices."

In Beijing last May, we met with the Deputy Director, Yang Guansan, and Feng Chujun, Research Fellow, of the China Social Survey System (hereafter CSSS), the primary governmental agency responsible for national public opinion polls. The first and leading social survey organization in China, CSSS began conducting scientific polls in 1984 under the Economic System Reform Institute of China. In May 1987, CSSS came under the jurisdiction of the State Commission for Restructuring the Economic System. The CSSS has a staff of thirty researchers and has three survey "networks": (1) urban citizen survey, conducted seven to eight times a year and based on a probability multi-stage cluster sampling of 2580 residents in forty cities; (2) a rural citizen survey conducted from 100 field sites; and (3) a news survey system which depends on reports from 100 mass media agencies. The urban citizen surveys include a...