

Research Trip to Beijing, China

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In April 2019, I undertook a 3-week field study to study summit diplomacy in Beijing, China. While my research is mainly focused on Belt and Road Forum, I attended several events before and after the Belt and Road Forum. The second Belt and Road Forum is a 3-day forum held in Beijing from April 25 to 27 2019. With the theme of “Belt and Road Cooperation: Shaping a Brighter Shared Future”, the forum is a platform that aims to bring countries together under the BRI framework. I visited different regions of the city to observe several aspects related to the hosting of the forum, including city decorations, promotion channels, side events, security measures, and volunteers. I collected primary data mainly through observation and informal interviews. In this report, I will briefly introduce some important findings in my field trip.



A floral display in CBD promoting the Belt and Road Forum



A billboard in a metro's station promoting the Belt and Road Forum

First, I attended the opening ceremony of ‘The Journey Back Home: An Exhibition of Chinese Artifacts Repatriated from Italy’ in the National Museum of China. The ceremony was graced by representatives from the Embassy of Italy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The exhibition is a significant example of heritage conservation under the Belt and Road Initiative between China and a European country. Besides, I saw a group of delegation to the Forum who was escorted to visit the Silk Street Market. The interior and exterior of the market were embellished for the visit.



Pennants along major roads promoting the Belt and Road Forum



Animation Display (Belt and Road) on the curtain wall of the Silk Street Market



Welcome banner in the Silk Street Market

Next, I joined the 9th Asia Research Forum organised by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences under the theme of ‘Cooperation in Northeast Asia under the New Circumstances’. In the Forum, participants from different countries shared their views on the impacts on China's Belt and Road Initiative in Northeast Asia to the world. Afterwards, I met a group of senior politicians and think tank members from the US in a session discussing the operation of Chinese think tanks and challenges to the development of the Belt and Road. These conversations enriched my understandings to the multidisciplinary and repercussions of the Belt and Road and developed my knowledge of conducting field research in China.



A parallel session in the Asia Research Forum about the connectivity of the Belt and Road



China's seat in the roundtable summit. It is noted that only the host has a clock (and a gavel, not in the photo) on the desk.

I also visited the International Horticultural Exhibition in Yanqing District, which is a significant platform for cultural diplomacy. The Expo is closely linked with the Belt and Road Forum and the Belt and Road Initiative from the opening ceremony to the narrative of green development. Then, I went to the Yanqi Lake International Convention Center in Huairou District, where world leaders met in the roundtable of the Forum, to study the venue design, hospitality, logistics and other arrangements of the event.

The research trip helped me refine the methodology and the direction of my doctoral thesis. After the field research, I finished a pilot study on the Belt and Forum Form, which will eventually become part of my thesis. Last but not least, I would sincerely thank Santander and Royal Holloway, University of London for the funding to cover the expenses associated with this project. Also, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisors Professor Ben O'Loughlin and Professor Jinghan Zeng, for their support.