

21 May 2018

Tomorrow will be the first day of the China Dream Practicum – a two-week program designed to study the China Dream in context across six different cities in China. The first leg of the journey will be in Beijing, then we will move to Suzhou, Shanghai, Dali, Kunming, and finally round out our travels in Shenzhen. Throughout our time in China we will be meeting with various experts in the fields of economic development, foreign policy, technological innovation, and ecological modernization to talk to them about what they think about the China Dream and what it means to them and in their field.

As I understand it now, the China Dream essentially means support for the country's One Belt One Road Initiative (BRI) with a sprinkling of "green development" on a domestic scale. With my background in environmental policy coming into MIIS, I am the most excited about learning how the central government's support for green development has influenced environmental conservation and curious about how green development fits into the China Dream. My research going into the trip centered around environmental enforcement at the local level. The literature showed a gap between the priorities of the central government and the priorities of the local government suggesting that weak support at the local level was the largest limitation towards efforts of environmental conservation. While I take part in the course, I intend to investigate this claim and test whether environmental enforcement has been considered as a key component of the China Dream through the lens of China's green development.

22 May 2018

Our day started at Tsinghua University where Professor Ciqi Mei discussed “myths” surrounding China’s development and his research concerning Environmental Protection Bureaus (EPBs), a stroke of luck on my part. In the field of environmental enforcement, EPBs serve as the only local level enforcement mechanism. Interestingly, Professor Mei’s research, to me, showed a potential strengthening of EPBs relative importance (and arguably power) through the introduction of a large scale environmental survey.

When asked about the China Dream, Professor Mei emphasized strengthening China and the nationalistic sentiment that came with it. “Make China strong again” and you get political stability, is how I interpreted his response.



The afternoon consisted of a visit to Renmin University where Professor Ma Deyong spoke about his research in data mining from netizens of China’s social media platforms. This lecture presentation was given in Chinese and was a little harder to follow given the technical components, even with the help of our interpreter.

The major take away from Day 1 for me was that it appears that environmental enforcement may have a part in the China Dream which is very exciting.

23 May 2018

Today we met with Dr. Ke Fang at the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). He gave us an overview of AIIB touching on the bank's modes of operation and the characteristics that set AIIB apart from other multinational development banks. Even with China's majority share, he assured us that the bank operated separately from the goals of the Chinese central government, however it appeared as through the infrastructure projects shared as examples of the bank's work did fall in line with BRI.



For me, the visit made me rethink working for the organization in the future. In the past, I had pointed to AIIB's emphasis on environmental and social safeguards in its project approval stage as an example of China's pivot towards green development. While the frameworks do exist, I'm not sure they prioritized in decision making, and might actually serve as more of a lip service. When I asked whether Dr. Fang could elaborate on the environmental assessment process for transboundary infrastructure projects, he referred me to documents on AIIB's website instead of answering directly. I will need to do some research to see whether AIIB's international relations policies address comprehensive assessments; and, Unfortunately, I was not able to ask any meaningful follow up questions.



In the afternoon we visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs press conference. This was a valuable experience, because it gave us a glimpse into the recent events happening in the sphere of Chinese foreign affairs, but understandably, the Ministry's representative did not have any time to take questions from us.



24 May 2018

This morning we split into two groups based on our interests, the first was the North Korean nuclear threat and the second was environmental NGOs operating in China. I was in the latter grouping.

The organization we visited was called China Development Brief (CDB), and largescale NGO of about 20 staff members whose mission was to promote the sustainable development of civil society through information exchange. From what the staff shared with us, it appeared that civil society was growing in China and that the central government was slowly recognizing the benefits of the NGO space. They explained that NGOs often couple with members of the local government to promote their missions, but do not necessarily push for recognition. As a result, members of the community do not see the full benefits that civil society offers to communities and often mistake NGOs for charity organizations. However, the central government seems to understand where civil society fills in service gaps. While the central government offers general support, civil society had the power to operate in the areas that need extra attention that the central government may not have the capacity to address.

Even understanding that benefits of NGOs and civil society, the sector still faces challenges. Once of the recent reforms in China has made registering as an NGO more complicated, especially for international organizations operating in China. As of now, the organizations technically exist, but are not within the law to actually operate under they are formally registered, restricting the activity of organizations at the moment. Another issue mentioned was the implementation of the social credit system. Since philanthropy is a component more students will likely be participating in NGO work and volunteerism. However, the fear is that those participating will not understand the importance of the work the NGO is doing and will only view volunteer opportunities for their own personal gain. It seems to me like a double-edged sword and a difference in perspective between the government and the NGO sector where the government wants to see more volunteerism overall, and the NGO sector wants to see more meaningful participation and a deeper understanding of the overall mission.



In the afternoon, both groups met at the Microsoft offices to learn about developments in AI. Director Wang shared with us “Xiao Ice” China’s AI through Microsoft. It was amazing to see

how quickly the program was developed and how natural the program communicated with its audience. Dr. Wang explained that “China had missed the computer age” and that “you don’t see any Chinese computers,” because of this he said the central government is pouring money into the AI field so that China can be competitive in the market and maybe even become a leader once AI becomes more popular.



25 May 2018



In the morning we traveled from Beijing to Suzhou. The train ride was amazing. It was the first time I have ridden the high-speed train system in China. The last time I visited (in the summer of 2015) I'm not even sure whether there was a rail system up and running. It is incredible just how quickly everything changes here.

In the afternoon, we visited Suzhou Industrial Park, a new development area jointly created with Singapore. The park itself had multiple sectors, technological research and development, international trade, tourism, residential, shopping district, and education. Each area had a transportation hub that was either local (within the park) or connected to the rest of the high-speed rail system so that people could easily commute from Shanghai or Nanjing.

Unfortunately, we didn't have as much time to talk freely with the directors about the planning of the park. However, the discussion we had with the spokesperson were entertaining overall.

27 May 2018

This afternoon we visited Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, School of Innovation and Entrepreneurship. From how I understand it, it appeared as though the school was actually a small startup incubator where many of the students created and were promoting their own startups.

A few of the students shared their platforms, many in the form of apps. One group created an app that promoted inter-cultural competence through information sharing between countries. There, students could share their experiences in their country and in other countries and communicate with one another to improve cultural understandings. Another student created an app that created student jobs on campus. Much like other platforms in the US, this app created a marketplace for students where they could request goods and services, then other students could pick up the task and get paid for it.

The whole interaction was in Chinese, so a special thank you to our interpreter during our visit.

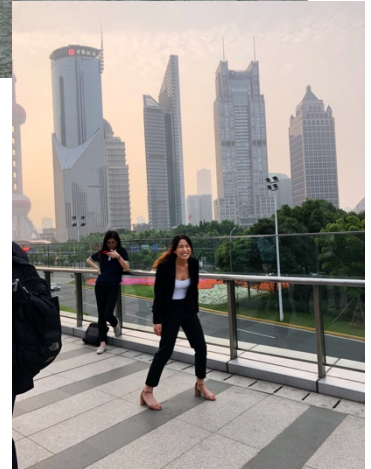


28 May 2018

This morning we had the unique opportunity to talk to General Manager Yu for Lingang International Innovation Center about SOEs responses to domestic and international challenges. Ms. Yu emphasized Lingang's focus on innovation and the organization's identity as a developer of Chinese industries. Lingang is the only SOE working in industrial parks as a developer.

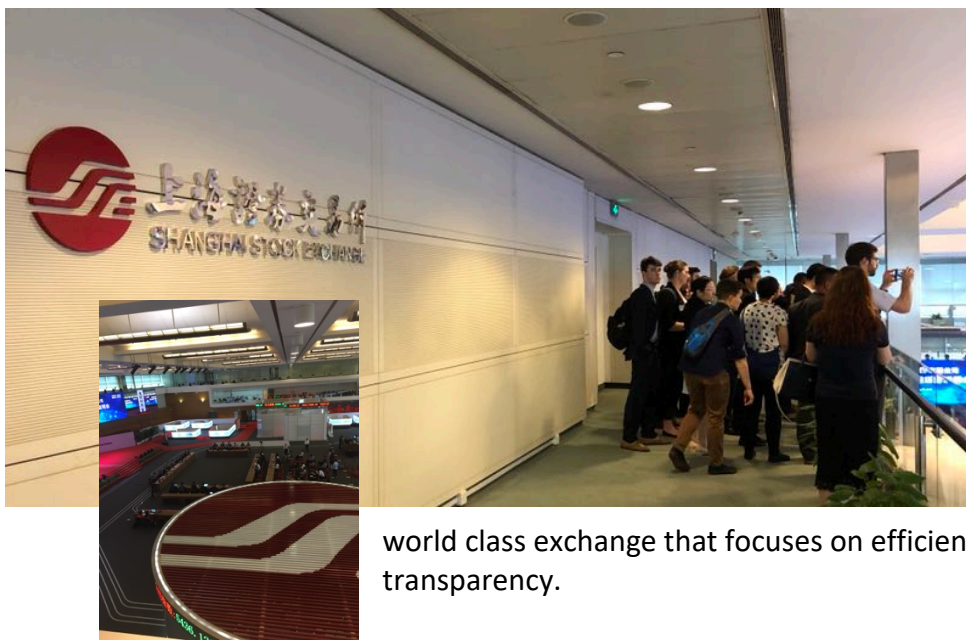


One of the major challenges identified was the red tape that came from converting old factories to new startups or residential areas. Also mentioned was the difficulty that came from securing land rights and finding companies willing to move into available properties. However, Ms. Yu did say that Lingang's status as an SOE gave the organization an advantage in navigating the bureaucratic system overall (for example, more information about which buildings can be renovated, which branches of government handle which permits) ultimately expediting renovation projects.



When asked about the China Dream's influence on the SOE, Ms. Yu stated that "the China Dream is universal" and that Lingang "cannot start at the 'dream stage,'" but focus on what can be accomplished. She explained that the China Dream, when applied in general to the SOE level, means improvements in efficiency and figuring out how to improve intercultural competence between companies. She says that "the job itself is the China Dream."

She described Lingang's roles as "the bridge between enterprises and the Chinese government" and that Lingang "must work closely with the government."



In the afternoon, we visited the Shanghai Stock Exchange (SSE). Sisi Miao, one of SSE's representatives, spoke with us about SSE's future strategy, creating a

world class exchange that focuses on efficiency, stability, and transparency.



Of interest to me, she talked about expanding green development as a major strategy of the exchange. She said that more of the motivations behind increasing green financing opportunities was SSE joining the UN sustainable stock exchange initiative. SSE's future plan is to support the nation's green industry and pollution reduction – with these actions indicative of the central government's recognition of China's environmental challenges and support for the incorporation of green financing.

On the China Dream Ms. Miao stated that SSE's priority is "supporting the real economy" by allocating capital so that domestic companies can grow.

In the evening we had discussion with Wang Xin of Friendly Investment Bank about Blockchain and the China Dream. Mr. Wang emphasized how Blockchain improves opportunities for success and opportunities for social mobility by exposing rural populations to alternative livelihoods. (This meeting was held in Chinese, so some of the discussion may have gotten lost in translation)



29 May 2018

Today we spoke with Vice President Ding Li of NPI (Non-Profit Incubator). NPI works as an intermediary between local government and the non-profit sector investing in development of community and social enterprising.



Ms. Li echoed some of the same challenges faced by China Development Brief, that one of the major difficulties in the development of the sector is the mindset and lack of volunteerism. She expanded on this explaining that the local level does not recognize the benefits that come from the social sector and that there is a common belief that NGOs should be operating for free.

The second discussion about global economic trend analysis was held

at Shanghai University and delivered by Professor Michele Geraci. Professor Geraci covered many topics, but centered around 5 pillars that the world can learn from China: 1) control of demography, 2) control of migration, 3) control of exchange rate, 4) control of interest rates, 5) control of trade and tariffs. The major take away from this, according to Geraci, was that China maintains the ability to control more or less volume and does not conform to markets.

When asked about the China Dream, Professor Geraci said that China is being led to the US in that "buying is easier than making." He said that in the short term, China will buy and in the long term, China will make. By this, I think he meant to say that China is buying what has already been done in the US (buying things that China cannot achieve in the short term). Then, in the long term, the country will innovate, building when it doesn't make sense to buy.

31 May 2018

Yesterday we arrived in Dali. The hotel that we're staying at is about 30 minutes away from the city which is inconvenient for exploring, but a breath of fresh air in terms of everything else. There is so much natural beauty here and the rain just brings it out more.

This morning Angela, from Yanfang Cun Lijiang Conservation and Development Center, came and met us all for breakfast to discuss NGOs role in the environment of Yunan. Angela talked to us about the challenges of environmental work – the tensions between the environment and local communities and unstable funding. One of the stories she shared was about an ecotourism initiative she helped with that involved training locals and creating local protectionism of the environment by establishing a local mascot, the golden money. Even though there was a local effort to protect the golden money and its habitat, the difficulty comes in the funding. The golden monkey was also a food source for the locals, its habitat was harvested for logging and used for livestock grazing. This created a conflict of interest that still hasn't been resolved. Environmental enforcement was weak because rangers' salaries were paid by NGOs which have unstable funding which caused inconsistencies in payments which created unstable livelihoods in environmental protection.



I was able to ask her what she saw the role of environmental protection bureaus (EPBs) to be. Her answer was interesting. She said that EPBs are interested in the promotion of policy into law and environmental enforcement, however, the kind of environmental protection she was describing was outside the scope of EPBs. EPBs are more concerned with pollution, energy saving and emissions reducing actions, but NOT environmental conservation. Environmental conservation falls under the advisement of the forestry bureau.

This was the first time I made the distinction between environmental conservation and pollution. Up until now, the two had gone hand in hand in my mind and were often addressed together under the umbrella of environmentalism. In China there seems to be a clear distinction where the environmental challenge of pollution is being addressed and recognized because it is an immediate threat to China's populations and development. However, environmental conservation does not seem to be as recognized. It appears to me that this will remain a back-burner issue and that pollution mitigation are the only policies taken seriously at the governmental level.

1 June 2018

Today we visited the Kunming School of Science and Technology and were invited to take part in a panel with six professors of the university. The topics ranged from Yunan's history and economic development to Yunan's trade partners in Southeast Asia. However, it was clear that minorities and green development were at the center of Yunan's identity. The professors talked about the national projects designed through the university creating national heritage sites and helping minorities modernize.

Green development was described as enmeshed with protection of ethnic minorities in that research in conservation must also consider the cultures of Yunan. In this light, the China Dream was explained as ethnic minorities having the ability to realize their cultural identities through green economic development.

After the panel, we were taken to a classroom to have a faculty led discussion with a few of the university's students. The discussion was actually very interesting. We ended up comparing the China Dream to the American Dream and concluded that the China Dream appeared to have two tiers – the first at the national level and the second at the individual level. At the national



level, the China Dream meant creating a stronger China. This reinforced the Professor Mei's interpretation from the first day of the practicum, economic development and a strong sense of nationalism. At the individual level, the China Dream was the same as the American Dream – a chance at social mobility and stability, and a hope for a better tomorrow. Honestly, I think the same sentiments of the American and the China Dreams are shared among all countries and all people.

The second half of the day was spent at Yunan Social Science Academy with Vice Dean Chen Lijun. The topic of the discussion was China's One Belt One Road Initiative (BRI) and policy towards Southeast Asia. Vice Dean Chen emphasized Yunan's unique role in the initiative pointing to President Xi's remarks about Yunan being an important hub to connect South and Southeast Asia. The plan for Yunan consisted of four parts: 1) establish a regional/international trade center, 2) establish an international technological and innovation center, 3) establish an international financial services center, and 4) establish a center for people to people cultural exchanges. Chen said that the basic message behind these measures was to continue to open up to the rest of the world.



Interestingly, the talk touched on similar themes of the China Dream that we discussed with the students at Kunming School of Science and Technology. Vice Dean Chen also mentioned that the central government wanted Yunan to be a demonstration of national unity and progress. To me, this sounded a lot like the national level of the China Dream. Then, later, Chen explained how Yunan's economic development would impact poverty alleviation. By increasing trade between Yunan and more developed provinces the 'open-up' policy would help Yunan to develop economically and lift the population out of poverty. This sounded like the individual level of the China Dream.

3 June 2018

This evening we visited Future + Academy and heard from Jennifer Chan and CEO Mr. Wang as they spoke about their start up impact investing, city planning, and architectural design organization. Unfortunately, we had some technical difficulties with the receivers, so the discussion was difficult to hear, however, a few pieces stood out to me. The first concerned building identities for Chinese cities. Ms. Chan talked about how a majority of Chinese cities all look the same. As a result, one of the major challenges for professionals was figuring out how to define and discover the identity of local cities.

The second had to do with environmental protection. In the presentation, it was mentioned several times that Shenzhen takes environmental protection seriously. From what I could understand, this came mainly from setting aside areas of land that were designated as 'fast growth areas' or land that was strictly used for the development of the city. As the city continued to grow and develop economically over the past 25 years, there was a push for the preservation of Shenzhen's natural beauty. This resulted in a policy that reserves half of Shenzhen's land mass, designated areas that do not allow the development of infrastructure. This was cited as "an important way to preserve the ecological environment of Shenzhen."

Upon follow up, it seems as though outside of this strict policy, environmental enforcement mechanisms are not in place. It appears as though outside the 50% protected areas, developers are allowed to develop however they want. However, in order to incentivize green development, the central government has reduced the amount of red tape around projects it considers green. From what we learned at the Lingang SOE, this could be a strong incentive for private firms navigating the bureaucratic system.

4 June 2018

Today is my last day in China. Upon reflection of my travels, I'm surprised by how loosely defined the China Dream really is. While it appears to have two tiers, the national and the individual levels, these can vary substantially based on the lens. I'm looking forward to expanding my research in environmental enforcement mechanisms in China and incorporate what the China Dream might mean for this sector.