

The University of Hong Kong
Chui's Student Excellence Scheme (徐氏卓越學生計劃)
Learning Report

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Introduction

Thanks to the support of the Department of Politics and Public Administration and Chui's Student Excellence Scheme, I together with two of my classmates at the Faculty of Social Sciences were able to attend the Paper Session of the Midwest Political Science Association ('MPSA') Annual Conference in early April 2018. We presented our research work in a 15-min presentation and received constructive feedback to further polish our papers before finally submitting them in early June. Besides, we grabbed the opportunities to interact with international relations scholars from all over the world, visit one of the museums and strengthen our friendship in the trip.

Main Activity – Paper Session

Preparatory work

I am a co-author of the research paper 'The Use of Force Abroad A National Experiment in China'. Under the supervision of Dr Kai Quek, Assistant Professor at the Department of Politics and Public Administration, we conducted an online survey experiment and investigated into the public opinion towards the government's use of force beyond immediate territorial defence in a foreseeable future. This research topic is highly relevant given the expanding economic interests of China as well as the official rhetoric of the non-interference principle. Nonetheless, survey experiments conducted on such topic in the context of China are not adequate, when compared to their western counterparts.

As a result, since early summer 2017, we had been busy preparing for the launch of a survey experiment. Eventually we had received over 1,000 responses, which provided a strong foundation for in-depth examination of the nature and drivers of China's foreign assertiveness from the angle of the domestic audience. We were delighted to learn that MPSA was impressed by our findings and invited us to the conference.

Participation

We presented our survey design, findings and implications in front of numerous other research teams at Palmer House Hilton on 5 April. We outlined some of the most significant and surprising findings, such as that the Chinese public are generally not deterred by a militarily strong enemy, and will support the government's action to use force against such country. China's economic interests play a crucial role in public support, while the presence of co-citizens in the crisis-stricken area (a strongly humanising variable) does not matter much

to the Chinese. These findings pose a sharp contrast to responses of the Western public. After we exposed the audience with such astounding results, we were glad to have received numerous enthusiastic comments and questions.



Photo A: Presentation of our Experimental Design in Paper Session

Reflections

1. Polishing research and presentation skills

This experience has greatly polished my research and presentation skills, equipping me with better capabilities to deal with situations which require high intensity of knowledge delivery and speaker-audience interactions.

To start with, research skills are paramount throughout the learning experience. In my junior years of undergraduate study, I worked as an Intern Researcher at the Risk Society and Policy Research Center at the National Taiwan University and Research Assistant for a professor at the University of Hong Kong. What makes the present experience unique is that it will be my first time participating in such a large-scale academic conference involving intensive intellectual stimulation and exchange. As undergraduate students, it was a great honour to be invited to present our paper in front of reputable figures and academic giants in the field of international relations studies. Our research abilities were vigorously tested.

Presentation skills, on the other hand, were important in the sense that our year-long efforts had to be condensed into a 15-min presentation. We did several rehearsals before our departure and bore in mind that our focus must be narrow enough to prevent losing the attention from our audience. Needless to say, we faced immense pressure. Luckily, we pre-

empted some questions (with some additional slides) and were equipped with the relevant knowledge and confidence to address the remaining inquiries. The overall feedback was satisfactory indeed.

2. Interactions with International Relations Scholars

The conference held by MPSA, in particular, is one enjoying a giant network of multidisciplinary scholars and international pundits. That more than 80 paper sessions were held shows its prestigious and renowned image. Insightful comments received after our presentation play a major role in highlighting some of our paper's limitations which we better address before final submission. The conference also offers networking opportunities and professional development sessions to account for scholars at every career stage. I remembered a research team consisting of Taiwanese researchers who similarly conducted a survey experiment on the use of force by the government against an invasion, save that it was in the context of Taiwan. We shared the interest in the topic of use of force, and exchanged our understanding and analysis of the contemporary politics in the Asia-Pacific region. The conversation, despite short, was extremely meaningful and rewarding.

Other Learning Experiences

1. Visit to the Field Museum

We also spared an afternoon to visit the Field Museum near our hotel. There was an exhibition on the topic of race. Some thirty bronze sculptures were made by an artist and displayed in that particular museum in the 1930s. At that time, these sculptures portrayed physical traits (such as skin colour, hair texture, shape of the lips) and implied that differences in physical look had something to do with people's behaviour. Today we call this racism. The museum now sends a strong message that race is only in people's heads. I was particularly impressed by this exhibition for its significant role in public education, especially in light of the recent events regarding police violence and the corresponding rights movement of the coloured race in America.



Photo B: Exhibition on Race at Field Museum

2. Exploring the City and Building Friendship

Finally, we paid a visit to the Millennium Park in the Loop community area of Chicago and took a group photo in front of the famous Cloud Gate. It is a public sculpture and its surface reflects the city's skyline. We in the meantime reflected on what we had gone through and appreciated our time together, embracing challenges and addressing research difficulties. In this seven-day journey, we met new friends, learnt innovative ideas regarding Chinese politics and had a glimpse of the world-renowned city. It shall undoubtedly be a lasting memory for all three of us.



Photo C: Cloud Gate at Millennium Park in Chicago