

**Name of scholarship recipient:** Angela Leggett

**Home institution:** Graduate School of East Asian Studies, Free University of Berlin

**Semester:** PhD, third semester, second year

**Exchange institution:** Peking University

As part of the University Alliance for Sustainability (UAS) programme I was awarded the opportunity to undertake a six week research stay at Peking University, to further the development of my PhD project, which investigates Civil Society Organisation (CSO) monitoring of Environmental Corporate Social Responsibility (ECSR) in China. Having almost completed two semesters at my home institution, the Graduate School of East Asian Studies (GEAS), Free University of Berlin (FU), the exchange during September and October this year provided an extremely valuable opportunity to connect with scholars at PKU, enrich my theoretical understanding and lay the groundwork for more intense empirical field work in 2016.

The UAS initiative is designed to facilitate scholarly exchange between partner universities to enrich dialogue around sustainability. My exchange provided an invaluable opportunity to connect with and learn from scholars at PKU, as well as the academic community in China more generally. Given the interdisciplinary nature of my PhD project, I met with academics from sociology, politics, law and management studies, and gained various perspectives on CSR, environmental politics and civil society in contemporary China. In addition to connecting with professors, I also regularly participated in the Centre for Responsibility and Social Value research symposium with PKU students and scholars. While I had previously developed an understanding of relevant English and Chinese language literature from these fields, the scholars at PKU opened my eyes to many new perspectives, academic publications and government documents, which I could not access from Germany. This dialogue with PKU professors and my subsequent own desk research helped me further develop my theoretical framework and overall research design.

The stay in Beijing not only allowed me to connect with academics at our partner university, but also key actors for my empirical case studies, which I will further investigate in 2016. My PhD project considers three case study examples of the CSO ECSR monitoring phenomenon, and two are based in Beijing. First, 公众环境研究中心 (Institute for Public and Environmental, IPE) represents a network of smaller ECSOs throughout China and undertakes numerous campaigns around monitoring, information disclosure and public participation. Since 2012 IPE has led a campaign targeting the textile industry, which is part of their overall Green Supply Chain program across numerous sectors. Annually published reports rank Chinese and international brands on criteria across five categories: communication and follow-up, compliance and corrective action, extended green supply chain, data disclosure and target setting, responsible recycling. Initially, IPE examines local government pollution database records to establish links between Chinese

suppliers and international brands. In addition, local CSOs in the GCA network make on-site visits to supplier companies to test pollution, e.g. water and soil samples. Brands are notified of problem suppliers and asked to (a) confirm awareness, and (b) respond to malpractice. The initial stage of my research involves document analysis of four reports of this kind covering a period between 2010 and 2014. In organisational observation and interviews will allow me to delve deeper in phase two. During my six week UAS exchange in Beijing I visited IPE on numerous occasions, worked with the Green Supply Chain team, gained access to new documents and contacts with government and business, and conducted some preliminary interviews. This experience not only helped me gain deeper knowledge of the case and develop my practical skills as a researcher, but also develop trust with participants.

My second Beijing based case concerns a campaign against construction of a new waste incineration plant in 阿苏卫 (Asuwei) district, which is led by the CSO 自然大学 (Nature University). Since 2009, Nature University has campaigned against the proposed development of incineration plants in Asuwei by 北京华源惠众环保科技有限公司 (Beijing Huayuan Huizhong Environmental Protection Technology Co. Ltd), a new joint venture created by two SOEs, 北京市环卫集团 (Beijing City Sanitation Group) and 北京京能清洁能源电力股份有限公司 (Beijing Jing Clean Energy Co. Ltd). Initially, Nature University pressure resulted in the project being halted by government. Between 2014 and 2015 four Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) were carried out and a public hearing was held in April 2015. Development of plants was reapproved. However, Nature University is continuing to appeal, with the aim of stopping development of waste incineration plants altogether in favour of more environmentally friendly waste management systems. As with my first case, actually being in Beijing allowed me to visit Nature University and conduct preliminary interviews with participants, so that I could clarify key questions, observe meetings with stakeholders and gain access to new sources.

Overall, the UAS research exchange in Beijing deepened my understanding of sustainability and impacted my future research goals. Through connecting with the academic community at PKU I gained greater insight into concepts applying to environmental responsibility and sustainable economic development across various disciplines, including politics, sociology, law and business. While my research in Germany had set an important basis, exchanges with scholars and practitioners in China provided the opportunity to gain direction on the most up to date political, legal and business developments around ECSR, as well as the ever changing civil society situation, and role of CSOs in monitoring firms' environmental impact in China. The PKU research exchange was both informative and inspiring, and certainly deepened my interest in research concerning corporate environmental behaviour, monitoring and public participation. Concretely, the six week stay helped me to build connections and get to know the field to inform my loner empirical phase in 2016 and

deliver more targeted results. Moreover, dynamics between State, society and business around sustainable economic development are not only relevant for the Chinese case, but rather all national contexts, as researchers and practitioners around the world investigate means for achieving sustainable development with reduce environmental impact into the future.