



Llywodraeth Cymru
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TITLE Visit to Beijing and Chongqing, China, to progress Government relationships and promote Welsh interests.

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I have recently returned from a 6 day visit to China, the purpose of which was to reinforce and progress the Government-to-Government relationships established with the Municipal Governments of Beijing and Chongqing, and to promote Welsh interests in the fields of business, education and culture.

China is the second largest economy in the world and is still experiencing growth levels. It offers huge potential in the trade and education areas in particular, while there is a thirst for more cultural links. Welsh Government efforts are focused on the development of relationships at the Municipal / Provincial Government level through which to access business and other opportunities. The role and influence of Government in China cannot be overestimated.

I had a briefing meeting with the British Ambassador to China, the head of UK Trade & Investment China, and the Director British Council China to discuss UK-China relationships, business opportunities and cultural and educational matters.

The First Minister signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Beijing Municipal Government (representing a population of some 20 million) during his visit to China in October 2011. Our Business, Enterprise, Technology and Science Department (BETS) signed a MOU with the Beijing Government Investment Promotion Bureau in June 2012, following which we have hosted 5 business delegations from Beijing in Wales.

During my visit, my own Department of Housing, Regeneration and Heritage signed a MOU with the Beijing Government's Culture Bureau to promote and encourage greater contact and collaboration in the fields of heritage, art and culture, building on engagement that has already begun, for example the successful tour by the BBC National Orchestra of Wales to Beijing in July last year. My visit also facilitated the signing of a collaboration MOU between the National Museum Wales and the Beijing Capital Museum, one of the most prestigious art museums in China.

I met Mme Hou Yulan, Deputy Secretary General of the Beijing Municipal Government, to discuss progress on the Wales - Beijing relationship and the scope for its further development. I gave a wide-ranging interview to the "Economy" magazine, published by the State Council, with a circulation of over 250,000 to an influential readership including Central Government and State Ministries, Municipal Governments and State-Owned Enterprises.

On 1 March I hosted a St David's Day Reception for around 150 key contacts in the fields of Government, business, education and culture, some of whom had travelled considerable distances to attend. Attendees also included members of the Beijing St David's Society.

I also visited the Forbidden City and the Hutong (narrow lanes) area of Beijing, both being among the most important cultural tourism sites in Beijing. Those visits were arranged by the World Cities Tourism Federation, of which Wales has recently become a member.

Wales' relationship with Chongqing (a Municipality of some 33 million people and amongst the fastest developing parts of China) has been thriving since the signing of the first MOU in 2006. The relationship is the most extensive and most active between any part of the UK and China.

In Chongqing I officially launched Wales Week and opened the National Museum Wales' exhibition "Wales - Land of the Red Dragon", which will run for four months at the China Three Gorges Museum. I hosted a Reception at the same venue for around 200 key contacts in the fields of Government, business, education and culture, including some who had travelled for 5 hours by road to attend, a testimony to the relationships we have built up.

I was taken aback by the profile and reputation that Wales has established in the region, and the eagerness displayed by so many people to work with Wales. The opening ceremony of Wales Week included the signing of three MOUs between:

- the Welsh Government's Department for Housing, Regeneration & Heritage and the Chongqing Municipal Government's Culture Bureau to collaborate in the areas of art, heritage and culture;
- the Welsh Government's Department for Business, Enterprise, Technology & Science and the Chongqing Foreign Trade and Economic Commission (COFTEC) to collaborate in the identification and development of business opportunities;
- five Welsh Universities (Cardiff Metropolitan, Newport, Swansea Metropolitan, Glyndwr and Glamorgan) and a private sector creative design company for the establishment of a commercial design-based consortium.

I met Ms Tan Jialing, Vice Mayor of the Municipal Government of Chongqing to discuss the Wales - Chongqing relationship and its further development. I was accompanied by Welsh Government staff, the British Consul General, with whom I had already held a briefing meeting, and the Director of the British Council, Chongqing.

I held a briefing dinner with participants in a Welsh Government trade mission visiting Chongqing as part of Wales Week, the feedback from which so far has been very positive with expectations exceeded in a number of cases.

I addressed a gathering of some 65 students at the Sichuan International Studies University on the subject of regeneration, and was pleasantly surprised by their genuine interest in our regeneration experience in Wales.

I visited and held discussions with the Executive Director of a £3billion private sector regeneration project to transform a previous heavy industry and derelict residential area into a mixed residential, commercial and leisure development, the scale of which is breathtaking. Equally breathtaking is a social housing project I visited which is developing 560,000 units within the city of Chongqing.

I visited the Chongqing Huguang Guild Hall Museum, and the Sichuan Opera House Museum and Theatre, both reflecting the rich cultural and ethnic traditions of the region.

I met a delegation from the Culture Bureau of neighbouring Guizhou Province which is keen to develop wider links with Wales. They will be visiting Wales shortly in collaboration with the National Museums Wales.

I opened a "Tourism Salon" organised by our Welsh Government staff involving around 25 travel media and tour operators to promote Wales as a tourist destination for the fast-increasing numbers of Chinese tourists visiting Europe.

My visit to China was an eye-opening experience in a number of ways. I have been hugely impressed by the way our staff on the ground have built up the profile and reputation of Wales, working through the Government relationships we have established. It is testament to the strength of those relationships at Government level that Wales has largely been able to avoid getting caught up in the tensions which are apparent at national UK and China levels.

I have been convinced of the opportunities available in the fields of business, education and culture, and of the need to engage pro-actively to exploit them. I believe my visit has contributed positively to that engagement.