

Ocean Gazing: Episode 33
One world, one ocean: Part I
COSEE-China Planning Workshop

<begin music>

Ari: So this is Ocean Gazing. It's the podcast where we find out that the oceans actually connect us all, even when we're on opposite sides of the planet. I'm Ari Daniel Shapiro. Xuchen Wang is a research scientist. He's at the University of Massachusetts at Boston in the department of Environmental, Coastal & Ocean Sciences. He's from China originally, and now he splits his professional time between there and here.

Wang: Based on my experience working in China, I realized that marine science education is so limited to a few number of people. And outreach, the general population about marine science - it's just not there. They just don't know what's going on with oceans. All they know is seafood about oceans.

Ari: And Wang got interested in doing something about that. About raising the ocean literacy of his country. Now, one of Wang's colleagues is in the same dept at UMass Boston: Professor Bob Chen. Chen's an organic geochemist. And he's been actively involved with ocean science education for years. He's really good at forming partnerships with all kinds of groups like Boston Public Schools, for example. Wang thought Chen would really benefit from a trip to China, and might have ideas for how to build up collaboration of some sort. So a few years ago, when Wang working at the Institute of Oceanology, Chinese Academy of Science in Qingdao, he invited Chen to visit China. And Chen, he was just blown away.

Chen: Things were possible in China that were not possible in the United States or any other country in the world. New cities were popping up in the spans of less than 5 years, and it was clear that science was changing at a very rapid pace. China is a remarkably prosperous currently. They are moving on an upward trend in science and technology. And it was something that if you don't collaborate now, you'll be missing a lot of opportunities.

Ari: Fast-forward now to early March of this year. Bob Chen and Xuchen Wang, along with Minhan Dai, a professor and dean at Xiamen University in china, and a bunch of Chinese and American students, professors, and government officials, worked to organize the first ever COSEE-China planning workshop. To talk about what a COSEE - a Centers for Ocean Sciences Education Excellence - might look like in China. Who would be involved. How it would be structured.

The workshop involved a delegation of 15 individuals, each one from a different COSEE centers in the US. I applied, and I was fortunate enough to be selected as one of the delegation. The next two episodes of Ocean Gazing are devoted to this workshop and the future of ocean science education in China. Stay tuned.

<fade up intro music; and cross-fade with sound of Great Wall>

Ari: We got to china with an extra day before the official workshop started. And so we

visited the Great Wall. It was terrifically impressive. It just undulates with the hillsides and mountains, running up and down the slopes. The day we went, there were tons of people there. The Great Wall was blanketed with snow, making the steeper portions really treacherous actually. I walked with our tour guide whose English name is Janet but whose Chinese name is...

Yan: My Chinese name is Yan Chue Jie. You climb the wall, you climb the top, there is a stone tablet write down with Chinese character: "You are not a real hero until you're here." This is a very old Chinese saying. <fade up sounds of the Great Wall crowds under next graf>

Ari: Seeing the Great Wall and everybody on it really drove home what China is capable of.

Chen: They have the manpower and the will and the capacity to be able to pull off large projects on a global scale that the US can't. The US would still be doing an environmental impact statement of the first brick.

Ari: The workshop ahead felt like climbing up a part of the Great Wall. An important climb for sure, but challenging nevertheless. The pressure was really on to have a successful workshop and one that really got things moving forward towards establishing a COSEE-China.

Chen: <fade up sound of people milling> To be honest, the first day was sort of like a pressure cooker. Here it is, there are a lot of important people in the room - all the state, you know the national officials - that could make the decision to go or not to go.

Ari: The 2-day workshop started with a series of introductions and welcomes. <maybe fade a few of these up in quick succession> We learned about the state of ocean research and education in the US and China, what COSEE is in the US, and what it could look like for China. There were presentations, question and answer sessions, group discussions. <include audio for each of these> And during the coffee, dessert and fruit breaks, some of the Chinese participants told me what they thought about the workshop. The opportunities and the obstacles... Can you tell me what you do?

Bai Gu: My name is Bai Gu, from the National Natural Science Foundation of China

Ari: And why is international cooperation important?

Bai Gu: Nowadays, the scientist is very global. The mankind, we are facing to the common science issues, such as disease and global change, global warming. So for me the scientists work together not only in one country, but it should be the whole world.

Jiang: My name is Wensheng Jiang. I'm from Ocean University of China. I'm the vice dean.

Ari: You were talking yesterday about some of the obstacles to creating a COSEE-China.

Jiang: Because this kind of organization is for the education, the university researchers don't

have enough time, this is a problem. Another problem is that for the high school students, they have a lot of burden to enter the university. So they don't want to spend so many time on these kinds of things because oceanography is not part of examinations.

Chang: My name is Bill Chang. I'm working for National Science Foundation Office of International Science and Engineering. I'm hoping this concept of ocean education could be extended to China. And also train the Chinese 1.3 billion people, probably more than 40% of them have some interaction with the coastal area, and for those people to have a concept of safeguard Chinese marine resources and marine environment.

Li Wun: My name is Li Wun, and I'm a Master candidate from Xiamen University.

Ari: And why did you come to this workshop?

Li Wun: Because of my will to be some kind of in-between person.

Ari: And what do you mean by in-between person?

Li Wun: Since I'm now a student of the marine biology, I love it. And I think I will love it more when I step back a little bit and to be the person who introduce or who draw the ordinary people's attention to this amazing subject. I feel excited about it cause that's the exact thing I want.

Ari: The students we met were so driven and excited about being part of COSEE-China. About doing the work of connecting people. Li Wun was one example. Sammy Wang was another. <fade up the audio from sammy's video> He's a master's student at Xiamen University, and he put together a video - which you're listening to now - of pictures that he'd taken at the workshop and music that he'd selected, and we all watched it at the end of the workshop.

Chen: So the workshop I think was incredibly successful in that COSEE-China has been initiated. It's beyond expectations. Speaking to how fast things can happen in China, two days after the workshop we got notice from State Oceanic Administration - that's the equivalent of the US NOAA - that they were supporting the initiation of COSEE-China, I mean: 2 days. We do know there will be another meeting - a 2nd planning workshop of the seven universities plus probably 3 more. The other main positive was making personal connections between 15 US individuals and 30 Chinese individuals. And that diversity of interests was a very strong positive.

Ari: The workshop came to a close after two days, but the US delegation, we continued our trip. We flew to Xiamen in the south of China where we visited with high school and university students. I'll say more about those exchanges on the next podcast. But I thought I'd leave with you one of my favorite memories from the whole trip. It takes place on the beach in Xiamen. So I want you to picture a warm, sunny day. A gently sloping sandy beach with the sound of calm waves lapping at the shore. There are industrial signs too. Several effluent pipes drain into the sea. A handful of boats and ferries scurry out on the water.

Walking along the beach are Lundie Spence, the director of COSEE-Southeast in the US and

one of the US delegates, and Sammy Wang who I mentioned before. They walked together, scanning the beach for treasure.

Spence: We're looking at old bricks, like you can look at old bricks and -

Wang: - tell the difference.

Spence: Like this might be 200 years old, it might be 100 years old. So on the beach, not only do we have sand and shells, but we have remnants of human development, right? This goes to my old brick collection.

Wang: We're so proud that you have Xiamen samples in your collection.

Spence: Exactly.

Wang: Exactly, yeah.

Ari: What dreams are you two carrying back?

Wang: I really like that COSEE-China could be established, and also I'm so eager to go to United States to learn some very simple way to teach kids about ocean sciences. And then I could share my experiences in Xiamen in China. That would be wonderful. Thank you.

Spence: Gosh, I'm carrying back the dreams that we have to keep this COSEE connection going. Dreams build one world, one ocean, right?

Wang: Yeah, one world, one ocean. <laughs> Exactly.

Spence: <laughs> That's what dreams do.

Wang: We share the same dreams.

<fade up transition music>

Ari: We didn't receive any guesses on last episode's sonic stumper, so I thought I'd try one more time. <fade up stumper> You're listening to a type of recreational activity, at least for some. So what is that activity? You'll also find visit our website - oceangazing.org - to send in your guess. You'll also find our China blog, videos and photos from our trip to China, and an audio clip of Bob Chen recounting some of his favorite moments from that week.

<transition to outro music> There are lots of people to thank for this episode: Vera Shi, Carrie Lee, Huiwang Gao, and Wenqing Cao. And of course, Minhan Dai, Bob Chen, and Xuchen Wang. Xie xie.

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<fade up outro music to full and sustain until the end>

