CHAPTER 6

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION ON DEMAND

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Abstract: By describing several science communication activities carried out by the China Association for Science and Technology (CAST) as well as resources and strategies applied by CAST, this chapter tries to express an important principle for science communication in China, that is to say activities should be designed and implemented responding to varied demands of different groups of people.

Keywords: Science communication, China

China is the most populated country in the world and is still undergoing the developing process both in economy and in society. Science communicators in China are facing the challenges of many varied demands and very limited resources. Over the decades, we have learned an important principle for science communication in China. That is, science communication activities should be tailor-made and implemented responding to the varied needs of different groups of people.

1. BACKGROUND

Over the last two decades, Chinese people have seen the dramatic changes to which science and technology have greatly contributed. Thus, according to our survey, most of the public have a positive attitude towards science & technology. Their passion and concern about scientific development are not difficult to detect.

However, the requirements of different groups of people regarding science communication are very different. China is a large country in terms of geography and population. There is a big gap between the eastern and western areas of China, as well as between...
urban and rural areas. Children from rural areas (a number of about 70 million persons) only go to school for an average of seven years. There are even 8 million illiterate residents, most of them living in the western part of China. These people are eager to improve their standard of living by learning more scientific knowledge and by mastering more applied techniques related to their daily lives and production. In the meantime, more than 100 million people in China have regular access to the Internet. Most of them are teenagers and “white collar workers” in China’s eastern cities. Their demands as regards science communication are in cutting-edge science and technology developments and their impact on society.

As the main driving force of science communication in China, China Association for Science and Technology (CAST) has given much attention to the demand-oriented principle during its efforts on science communication.

2. ACTIVITIES MEETING DIFFERENT DEMANDS

Founded in 1958, CAST is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation of Chinese scientists and engineers, composed of 167 learned societies. It has local branches at different levels throughout China. The following are some demand-oriented science communication activities carried out by CAST.

2.1. Training Programmes and Consultation Services for Farmers

According to statistics, technical training is one of the main channels by which Chinese farmers have access to new techniques. It is also known that farmers are more likely to accept and trust face-to-face consultations and training rather than long-distance education programmes. CAST, therefore, encourages scientists to be engaged in outreach activities to provide scientific training and consultation services for farmers. At the same time, those pilot farmers who have applied agricultural techniques and therefore have gone from poverty to a more comfortable existence are encouraged to be mentors to other farmers during the training workshops. This kind of “peer-teaching” methodology was extremely welcome at our science communication programmes held in rural areas.

2.2. Hand-in-hand: Science for Teenagers

There is great demand for science education resources in China, such as equipment, qualified science teachers as well as well-designed extra-curricular scientific activities. CAST, working closely with the Ministry of Education, has been encouraging scientists and research institutes to support science education by providing popular science lectures, internships in laboratory for high-school students, guidance on teenager’s science research projects, training programmes for primary and high-school science teachers, organising science fairs, setting up virtual connection between scientists and teenagers through Internet, and so on.

Every year, thousands of scientists are involved in the China Adolescents’ Science and Technology Innovation Contest (CASTIC) as supervisors or judges. More than