

## CAFÉ SCIENTIFIQUE: A SUCCESSFUL MODEL OF SCIENCE COMMUNICATION FROM WEST TO CHINA

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### **Abstract**

Café Scientifique is a place where the public can explore the latest ideas in science and technology with the scientists, while enjoying a cup of coffee or a glass of wine freely. This kind of informal discussion is often taken place in cafes, bars, but always outside a traditional serious academic context. Its aim is to promote public engagement with science and to make science accountable, not to be a shop window for science. It is based on the Café Philosophique movement which was started in France in 1992 by the philosopher Marc Sautet who wanted a place where ordinary people could discuss topics in philosophy. Duncan Dallas of the UK adapted the model to science communication - leading to the development of the Café Scientifique movement, which so far has been popular and welcomed in the west. Now the movement has been introduced by the UK to China. From 2003 up to now, the British Council has organized lots of Café Scientifique activities in the city of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Chongqing, with the topics of global issues such as Zero Carbon City, Clone, GMO, global warming, etc. Since it came to China, it has been deeply loved by the Chinese public; more and more people participate in the Café Scientifique. In a relaxing and comfortable atmosphere, the public is involved in the discussion with the scientists and feel the charm of the science; for the first time, they develop a great interest in science. This paper will analyze how a mature model of science communication from west is introduced, and developed in a developing country, with the emphasis on its communication process and effects, which can fully show a successful model of science communication can be expanded trans-culturally and shared in diverse culture.

**Keyword:** science communication, Diverse Culture, Model of science communication, Café scientifique

## 1. Introduction

What will you imagine if you hear the name, such as “Information Café”, “Drifting Island” Bar? Your answer is surely unconcerned with science. However, if I invite you to attend the activities of “Café Scientifique” ,held by the British Council, then you will have the chance to meet Chinese and British outstanding scientists and enjoy in science at these places. If you will attend “Café Scientifique” on February 18, you’ll find a lot of tables with many kinds of juices and nuts and the people around the tables.

Prof. Marcus du Sautoy, from the University of Oxford in red, was telling something with a microphone in hand and looked very vigorous. He was talking to the audiences about primes in which he is interested. A photo of Beckham, holding a clothes printed 23, were showed on the screen. At the same time, Prof. Marcus du Sautoy said, “As you know, when Beckham joined in the football team Royal Madrid, he had chosen the 23. Why did he choose this number? Someone think that it is a lucky number, however someone don’t think so, because Caesar was killed by 23 cuts. As for me it is only a Prime.” What he said was so interesting to the audiences that they forgot to drink the juice and eat the nuts in hands.

This is one of the activities of “Café Scientifique” and it was held in Beijing International Trade Center. The topic was “The Music of the Primes”[1]

## 2. Where was the “Café Scientifique” from?

The so-called “Café Scientifique” is an academic free gathering where we can express our opinions freely about the latest scientific and technological developments along with the taste of Coffee. Such gatherings are usually held, in the Cafes, Bars, and Restaurants and even in Theatres, far away from the traditional academic environment and atmosphere. Its history can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century France.

The prototype of “Café Scientifique” is Cavendish Society of Physics founded by JJ Thomson in 19<sup>th</sup> century. JJ Thomson talked about what they had observed, heard and tested with his workmates and friends freely when they drunk afternoon tea everyday. Sometimes, the themes even included fiction, film, drama and music. Lusefu made afternoon tea, chat into his daily most important moment in his science work team, as he was the leader in the laboratory. He inspired people to find his own interest indeed, and enjoyed in it. This made his work atmosphere free, democratic, debatable and critical. Later Cambridge style “work in leisure”, “freedom and independence” were derived from that.

The first “Café Scientifique” was established in Leeds of the United Kingdom in 1998. It promoted science to the public in relaxed style. Then it occurred one by one in the Newcastle, Nottinghamshire, Oxford, and other in the cities. Now, this network has expanded to many other British cities.

“Café Scientifique” was introduced to China by British Council in 2003. Since then, it has been held regularly with the participation of outstanding scientists of China and British to discuss scientific issues concerned by the public, while they tasted for their coffee and tea. The public had the change to talk face to face with scientists and discuss the latest scientific and technological developments. There were 8-10 activities in average. From August 2003 to January 2006, about 40 activities were held respectively in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chongqing. In the Twenty five topics, five fields such as the life sciences, the environment and human health, construction and urban planning, art and science and space science have been discussed. The British Council had held a lot of activities in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chongqing in 2005. The theme involved were, zero carbon homes, cancer, transgenic, cloning, climate warming, and other current global issues in the field of science and technology. There were more and more people loving these activities and attending them.

“Café Scientifique” changed past scientific serious impression into affinitive one. The public had a chance to discuss scientific and technical issues in a relaxed atmosphere. People can feel the charm of science, sharing the fun of science and technology in the entertainment.

### 3. Communication Process

A complete and effective information dissemination process is that the information is transmitted to the audience successfully and in time feedback to the audience. This is an interaction process. Disseminators of information hope to their audiences being interested in the information and having the opportunity to participate in it, understanding it through constant communication and discussion. In this process, it's necessary to evaluate all aspects timely. That is, it's important to get feedback. According the feedback, we should amend them continually to get the best results. "Café Scientifique" is exactly the reflection of this process as shown in figure1.

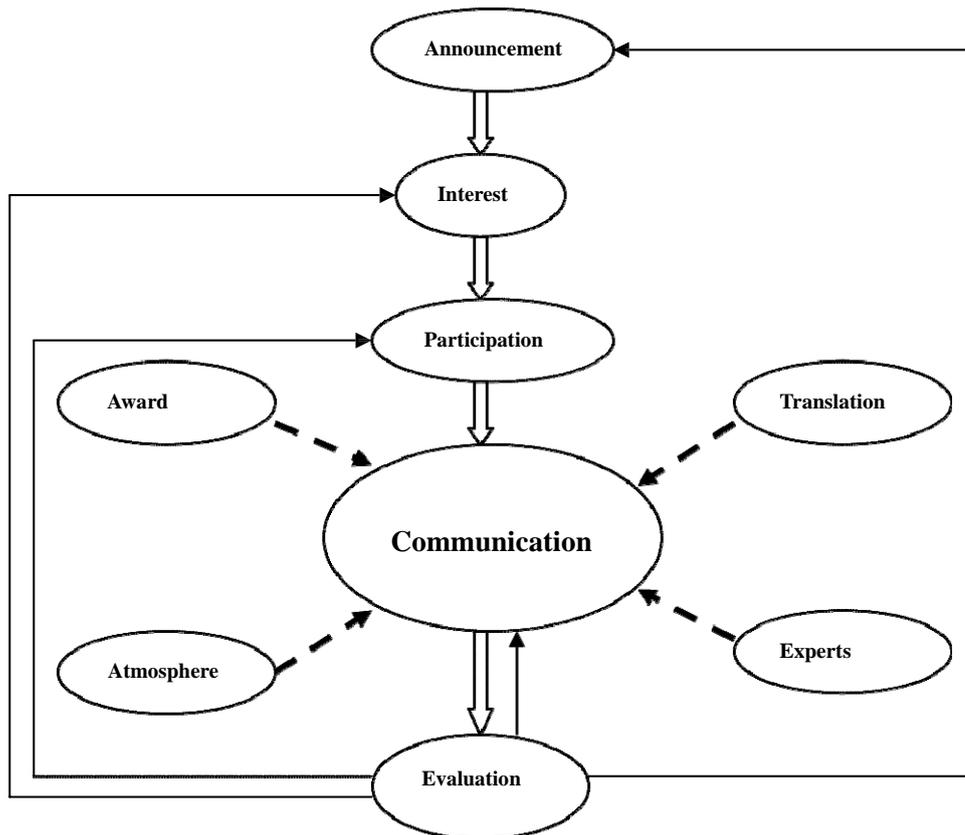


Figure.1

#### 3.1 Announcement

The topics and the introduction of speakers will be in the website of the British Council announced in advance, and then cooperated with [sina.com](http://sina.com) in the simultaneous release of their schedules on the website, so as to let more people informed. The public can subscribe to the electronic schedule on the websites or printed one by post office, which could make the public receive schedule regularly.

#### 3.2 Attraction and interest

It attracts the public attention through the latest hot scientific issues and set topics in reference to the public recommendations. These activities attracted the attention of the community. At the same time, outstanding scientists also made the activities expected to become. Finally, the comfortable and relaxed environment made people feel that participation in such an activity will have a happy night.

#### 3.3 Participation

"Café Scientifique" on the public not to participate in any particular request, regardless of occupation, age and

educational attainment of what can be applied to participate in, or do not have the scientific and technical knowledge for the audience. As long as you submitted application online you will have chance to get the tickets and can participate in the activities.

### **3.4 Communication**

#### **3.4.1 The beginning of “Café Scientifique”**

In the beginning, it is usually a short lecture which was followed by a short break to the topping up of coffee and let the public in the discussion. After this, it's the time to ask questions, answer questions and discussion. Each one will have an opportunity to ask questions and sometimes questions are often begins with "It may be a stupid question, but....." However, these problems never were foolish. On the contrary it is very creative. This has enabled scientists and the public and between the public and the public, have ample time to discuss issues and scientific exchanges.

#### **3.4.2 Friendly atmosphere**

To the extent possible for the public to participate in, and does not think science and technology hard. The general gathering place located in café, bars, restaurants and even theatres, fitness room, far away from the traditional academic environment and atmosphere where the public can speak at any time to express their views.

#### **3.4.3 No language barrier**

Each session will employ professional translators to translate the whole process, which eliminate language barriers.

#### **3.4.4 Smooth communication**

From the requirements of experts, the communication capacity of scientists objectively ensured the smooth communication.

### **3.5 Feedback**

Before activities begin, each person will receive a questionnaire. At the end of the activities, the questionnaires will be recovered. According to the information of the audience filled in questionnaires, they can adjust the model timely. All of the activities of “Café Scientifique” contain the suggestion of audience.

The questionnaire includes the following question:

- 1 what do you expect to learn from the activity of café scientifique?
- 2 To what extent that you will feel satisfied?
- 3 What are your comments on the activity of café scientifique or the service?
- 4 Do you agree that café scientifique is a novelty?
- 5 What's your advice or suggestions for café scientifique?

## **4. Results and evaluation**

### **4.1 Big impact and wide ranges**

Since the initiation, scientific café has spread from Beijing to Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chongqing etc. So far it has been organized 40 times, please see the figure. 1, the topics concern “the mystery of life, environment and human health, architecture and city planning, science and arts, and space science etc.”

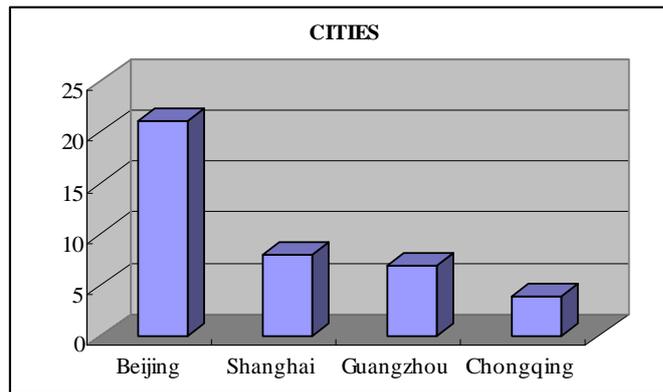


Figure.2

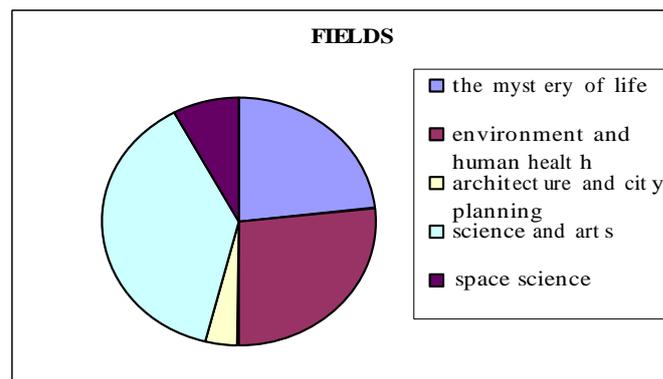


Figure.3

#### 4.2 The coverage of the media

Many of the print media and electronic media have reported it. SINA, the famous internet channel in China even recorded the whole process of the activity. And before it, it will announce it on the website. Some net friends even write their comments on scientific café and paste relevant information on their blogs

#### 4.3 Good feedback from the audience

The lively and professional introduction made by a good communicator, the speaker, inspire the public's great interest in science.

Wang Shan-ning, grade in two, from Beijing 55th middle school once took part in café scientifique. She had the same feelings that the activity of café scientifique was very interesting and helpful just as other audiences. "The speeches sound more vivid than my math classes in the school." After knowing that the speaker is a famous mathematics professor from the British Oxford University, that little girl felt very excited, "I am so happy to have the chance of close access to well-known scientists."

Ms Ai Wu-ling often participates in café scientifique. Every time she will make notes and put forward questions. "I am interested in science. As long as the topic is what I like, I will come here. I never worry about if I can understand it or not, because most of their lectures are very vivid and attractive to me."

The questionnaires made by the organizers show that the participants include man, women, the old and the young and most of them are the student of polytechnic majors.

#### 4.4 Make a good example for china to learn

On June 2005, New People Café Scientifique was organized jointly by SAST (Shanghai Association of science and technology) and Xinmin Evening Newspaper, a scientifique café of china itself. Every two weeks, citizens and experts will meet here, a scientific kingdom with no boundaries, taking about science while drinking relaxing coffee. Since it

was organized, this activity has been held many times, covering the topics from food safety, new energy, mobile technology, to clone etc. It is well welcomed by the public and very popular in shanghai now.

## **5. Experiences**

### **5.1 inviting the best scientists and experts**

The organizer is very careful of selecting the speakers. There are two requirements for the invited speakers: one is he/she has a good knowledge; the other is good expressiveness and caliber of his/her language. Sir John Sulston, father of Gene, who is also the Nobel winner in medicine of 2003 has been invited to scientific café. Besides him, such famous scholars as Tony Buzan and Georgina Ferry and Chinese famous scholars are invited too. These speakers not only bring the latest findings of their own research, but also are the authorities to answers the questions put forward by the audience.

### **5.2 Inspiration**

It inspires their interest in science, help the public close access to the science. The topics of scientific café cover from such hottest issues as Zero Carbon City, cancers, GMO, clone to global warming. All these topics chosen consider the advice from the public. The purpose of it is to attract more public participation in it and can get close access to touch the science and understand it.

### **5.3 Easy to participate**

Everyone is free to participate in the activity of scientific café. While listening to the speech, the audience can enjoy the free drinks and snacks in a relaxing atmosphere. There is no specific requirement for the audience to participate but only to have interest. As for the limit of the space, everyone needs to mail to the organizer for reservation in advance. If there are enough rooms then it is possible fort you to come without reservation

### **5.4 Draw lottery and free gifts**

Everyone can get free little gifts for participation, such as a notebook or a broche introducing the new trends of science. During the activity, there will a draw lottery time for the lucky audiences who can give the right answer for the question raised by the speakers. By this means the enthusiasm of audience are greatly aroused.

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