

# The Little Mermaid meets the Great Wall

By Chris Tachibana

**At an August 2011 meeting in Copenhagen, Chinese and Danish scientists worked on research collaborations and graduate programs for the Sino-Danish Center for Education and Research, which is launching its first projects**

- If you want prosperity for a year, grow grain. If you want prosperity for ten years, grow trees. If you want prosperity for one hundred years, grow people, said Uffe Toudal Pedersen, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, quoting a Chinese proverb.

The occasion was the official opening of the second symposium of the Sino-Danish Center for Education and Research (SDC), held at the Hotel Scandic Copenhagen on 24 August 2011. Speakers from China and Denmark echoed Pedersen's lofty hopes for long-term prosperity, while delving into the details of what the center plans to do.

SDC was founded to promote knowledge collaboration between China and Denmark in areas where the countries have complementary strengths. It's the first joint initiative involving all eight Danish universities, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, and a foreign partner—the Chinese Academy of Sciences—said Karsten Dybvad, CEO, Confederation of Danish Industry, in his keynote address. SDC is based in the 2008 Danish government strategy to

pursue knowledge-based collaborations with China, and was formalized in an agreement signed by Prime Ministers Wen Jiabao and Lars Løkke Rasmussen in April 2010.

For now, SDC is a virtual center, with stakeholders from Chinese and Danish academia, university management, industry, and government involved in the planning. By 2013, SDC will move into its own building, the House of the Danish Industry Foundation, sponsored by the foundation with up to 80 million Danish kroner, at the Yanqihu Campus of the Graduate University Chinese Academy of Science (GUCAS), 70 km north of Beijing. Operational financing is from equal contributions from the Chinese and Danish sides.

## Yin and yang balance in five research fields

The center is starting with five fields: nanoscience, water and environment, social sciences, sustainable energy, and life science, with Master's degree programs in three of the fields beginning in fall 2012.

- We selected high-profile fields with good research capacity on both sides, says Hans Gregersen, SDC executive director. He shares leadership duties with Zhu Xiangbin, assistant president and director of international affairs at GUCAS, who united Denmark's Little Mermaid and China's Great Wall on an introductory slide about the history of SDC. Gregersen was Research and Innovation Director at Aalborg Hospital Science Center from 2001 to 2010, and has been a visiting professor at two Chinese universities. He's preparing for a fuller experience, including learning the language, as he moves to China this fall to be more closely involved with SDC's day-to-day operations.

- A presence is so important. I visit every month now, but it's not the same. Once I'm living there, I'll no longer be considered a guest, says Hans Gregersen.

## From meetings and workshops to full graduate degrees

SDC research is starting slowly but surely with researcher and student exchanges, collaborative projects, and workshops in the five research fields. When fully operational, SDC plans to have 100 researchers, 150 PhD students, and 300 Master students. Classes and supervision will be in English, from Chinese and Danish professors, and graduates will earn a double degree from GUCAS and a Danish university. Chinese students are eager to get experience in English and to be involved in international collaborations, say professors attending the symposium. The number of Danish students interested in full immersion in a country so far from home remains to be seen.

One draw for students in both countries is potential industry connections through internships and other networking opportunities. Although the SDC mission is to strengthen research and education and encourage



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mobility and cultural exchange, the development of commercializable knowledge and technology has not been overlooked.

Proprietary rights are covered in the 2010 SDC partnership agreement, and SDC management includes an Industry Advisory Board with ten members to be selected from Chinese and Danish companies. Symposium speakers from both countries mentioned working with industry through guest lectureships, research partnerships, and case studies.

## Life science and biotechnology at SDC

One area with great potential for partnerships is biotechnology and biomedicine, says Ding Wenjun, GUCAS executive dean and Chinese principal coordinator of the SDC Life Science section. Ding's section will start with a Master's program in neuroscience, with future plans for research and degrees in 'omics—proteomics, genomics, metabolomics and bioinformatics. Initially, the section is focusing on neuroscience and cognition, where Ding says the benefits of collaboration are clear. With an enthusiastic smile, he says, - China offers very strong research teams in neuroscience and neuroimaging instrumentation. But unlike many Danish universities, GUCAS is not affiliated with a hospital, so SDC offers the possibility of clinical research. Director Gregersen also directs interested scientists to educational and collaborative opportunities in the Water and Environment, Nanotechnology, and Sustainable Energy sections of SDC. Keep an eye out for new opportunities, too. Gregersen is applying his research management experience to keep SDC focused on its long-term goals, but is also watching for new research themes where both Denmark and China can contribute and benefit, and where education can be connected to research. Diabetes, public health, epidemiology, medical devices, and basic research in heart disease are all areas under discussion.

- SDC is unique. It is truly a national project, seen from the Danish side. All eight universities are involved, and there is a lot of political support. You can see that from the people from the universities, industries, and governments of both countries who are involved. Both Denmark and China are saying: We want this to succeed, ends Gregersen as he prepares to become a resident of Beijing and on-site SDC director.