

Shifting gears in Shanghai

As shipbuilding around the world adjusts to new market realities and the digital shift begins to impact nearly all aspects of the industry, China is well underway on a new course, with higher-value, cleaner, and more efficient ships and construction as their beacons.



PROFESSOR
XING WENHUA
President, SSNAME

Leading the way is the Shanghai Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers, SSNAME. President of SSNAME, Professor Xing Wenhua, shares some thoughts on the current shift, and the future prospects.

Starting with the digital revolution, Prof. Xing relates that his members are taking their cue: “Digital technology is developing rapidly, and the Chinese shipbuilding industry has seized the opportunity for transformation by applying digital technology to ship design and ship construction. This will allow us to promote the development of environmentally-friendly ship types and raise the level of modular construction.”

For decades known as a producer of large, less sophisticated and inexpensive ship types, China has had growing success in penetrating high end markets in offshore, tankers and container ships. How can emerging digital technologies help the Chinese industry to achieve even better performance at the high end?

“China has made great progress in building ultra large container vessels, ultra large ore carriers, LNG carriers and VLGCs, which have been received favourably by shipowners. Along with the development of the Internet and communications, digital technology will surely bring great changes for Chinese shipbuilding, especially to design, operation and management.

“The level at which digital technology is applied will define the industry’s capabilities,” Prof. Xing continues. “It is recognised that information and digital technology is driving the modernisation of shipbuilding, and that the Chinese shipbuilding industry will inevitably leverage these technologies to catch up. To reach its goals, the Chinese shipbuilding industry will seek to develop the most advanced intelligent construction methods and transition towards the ‘intelligent shipyard.’”

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Cruise in the news

The cruise market is growing faster in China than perhaps anywhere, and Chinese interests have taken ownership of European yards in order to meet demand. How does SSNAME view opportunities in cruise construction for its members, and for the domestic market in general?

“The cruise market in China has grown rapidly in recent years, and the strength of demand creates a base for China to develop the sector further, as well as related activities. In fact, in addition to attracting more travellers, the cruise sector has drawn attention from the Chinese government.

Chinese authorities have announced several policies to develop equipment and facilities for cruising, and this has served as a great encouragement for the Chinese shipbuilding industry to diversify into designing and building cruise vessels.”

Cruise is known as a highly demanding segment for designers and builders, with European yards establishing a clear lead in experience and expertise. How can SSNAME close this gap?

“Shanghai has inherent advantages in design and construction when it comes to cruise vessels. Our members mostly come from shipyards, designers, research institutes, universities and equipment manufacturers. They are surely expecting the boom to continue and will raise their capabilities to benefit from the current upturn in cruise ship building,” says Prof. Xing.

Seeing the bigger picture

As with many things in China, once they take hold, developments are bigger, faster, and more comprehensive than in the rest of the world. Now the focus in China is shifting to the environment. How will the shipbuilding industry be affected?

“China’s government has been paying great attention to environmental sustainability, as witnessed by our commitment to the Paris Agreement. Some of our members have taken part in formulating international rules and regulations at IMO, and others have taken effective measures to respond to the new requirements. The challenges at present for our members include development of green ships and how to get rid of the slump in shipping brought by the low oil price.”

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Another shift well underway is in international cooperation. What are some of the most interesting international partnerships and cooperation for SSNAME members?

“After years of development, SSNAME has won both reputation and influence in the shipbuilding industry. To have more exchange and cooperation, the organisation has taken part in many international academic events and set up friendly relations with 14 well-known foreign societies involved in the industry.

“SSNAME is one of the sponsors of the Pan Asian Association of Maritime Societies and has hosted the PAAMES conference twice, playing an important role in the development of PAAMES. In addition, SSNAME is a member of World Maritime Technology Congress and was selected as the host Society of WMTC 2018.”

Another noteworthy international initiative for the SSNAME is Marintec China. What is your role there, and how important is this event to your members?

“SSNAME is the organiser of Marintec China, but we are also proud of having founded the event. With the great efforts made in the past 30 years, Marintec China is recognised as the largest maritime event in Asia Pacific.

“In accordance with the developing trends and hot topics in the industry, the theme for the 2017 forum is ‘Innovation, Smart Manufacturing and Collaboration’, which corresponds to the theme of the exhibition: ‘Strengthening, Leading, and Connecting’.

“At the same time, there will be a special area for presentations and discussions on cruise vessels. SSNAME will invite enterprises and experts to give their comments on both the building procedures and equipment on cruise vessels.”

What do you see as the single most important challenge to be met in Chinese ship design and building going forward?

“I think the most important challenges to be met in Chinese ship design and building relate to reducing pollution from ships and developing the unattended bridge. These are the challenges that need to be met, but they are also historic opportunities for the Chinese shipbuilding industry to develop.”