

CHINA: SURFING CONNECTIONS

The Legend of the Magic Wind

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The two common reactions I got when I told people I was going to China to help run a surfing contest were – “I didn’t know there was surf in China” or “imagine how crowded it will get if the Chinese start surfing”

In response to the first reaction, surfing in China isn’t new. Hainan Island is already well known for its surf and is hosting more contests and attracting more surfers every year. In fact, the WSL World Longboard championships were being held there the same weekend as the event I was helping run. As far as the second response goes, all I can say is the Chinese I met LOVE surfing. The whole vibe during the time I spent with the local surfers reminded me of the early days of my own surfing life and the birth of the modern surf culture. Just a group of stoked people loving the ocean and embracing the beach lifestyle for all it has to offer.

So here I was in Guangdong with Beijing born John Yang, driving towards the south east coast beaches of the mainland. John is a Berkeley graduate who caught the surfing bug in California while studying and working there. When he returned home he bought his love of surfing with him. He found out he wasn’t alone and was soon exploring the coast with a few locals and expats in search of waves. There is a chunk of coast between Hainan and Taiwan that has enough exposure to the swell from the South China sea to produce surfable waves. It was along this coastline that John had organized the first government approved surfing contest on the mainland. Some expats had run events there a decade ago but these were low key and not without difficulties. Surfing was and is still new to Chinese officialdom and that is what made this event a pioneering one. John had to spend months getting the support of the ShanWei and Hong Hai Wan government, as well as the local residents at ZheLang. Cherry Point was the chosen venue but things like building an access road to the beach, sourcing power and providing water and toilets all had to be taken care of. Thanks to the cooperative local officials and a great local work crew, this all fell into place a week before the event.

The contest

There is an ancient Chinese legend about a warrior borrowing the east wind to defeat his enemies but for the surfing contest John was hoping to borrow the north wind to generate good swell. As a new cold front



moved down south, the biggest worry lifted. According to the surf forecast, there would be waves on Dec. 5th and 6th at Cherry Point in Hong Hai Bay!

Pressing the go button for the event was an exercise in modern technological communication. The participants had all entered online and a We Chat network connected everyone in an instant. People were coming from all over China. Hong Kong, Hainan, and even YiChang. They were collected from various hotels and pickup points along the way and bussed for three hours to the coastal region where they were to stay for the duration of the event. Some didn’t arrive until around midnight but the next morning, after breakfast at the hotel, everyone was bussed out to Cherry Point. The surf was 2 -3ft and glassy. Perfect for a competition where surfing skills varied from experienced to “only been surfing a few months”.

A large group of local officials were on hand to open proceedings and after the requisite amount of speeches, claps and photographs we were off and running.. When lunchtime came, all the contestants and officials were taken to a local seafood restaurant for a great banquet. After years of sandwiches on the beach and pro-comp catering buses, this was a unique experience. Stopping a contest for lunch was a first but when we got back the waves were still happening so day one went off without a hitch.

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The bus ride back to the hotel later that night was full of surf stoke. Everyone was smiling and looking forward to the next day.

Thanks to the north wind, Cherry Point held its form and even though the rides were short, there were enough waves for the better surfers to show their skill. The great thing about the event was that no one seemed to mind if they lost. They were just stoked to be part of it all and part of the tribe. Open Chinese Mens, Womens and expat divisions all concluded and it was back to the hotel for the closing ceremony and banquet and presentation.

Where to now

What was really interesting to me was to see the aspects of pure surfing that were evident amongst the group. Discussing boards, the way they talked about waves, the social side of the gathering. I was shown a

video of a young Chinese guy sitting around a campfire with a bunch of friends and playing his acoustic guitar. He was singing a song he had written himself about how much he loved the waves and how surfing changed his life. Sound familiar? Look out Jack Johnson.

John Yang and his friends have plans and the local government likes them. The Guangdong/ ShenWei area has unemployment issues and the local government wants to do something about it. They see the area as a natural tourist destination for the millions of people who live nearby. As China continues to develop, the local officials want this area to be promoted as a water sports and healthy lifestyle hub. The successful completion of the contest showed the officials that surfing can be part of the picture. So don't worry about your local spot being invaded for a while yet. They have plenty of local places to discover before that will happen. Surfing in China – it's happening!

INTERNET ACTIVITIES. Based on article.

1. Locate all the places mentioned in the article.
2. Search web images for ancient Chinese fishing boats.
 - a. Select the image of the oldest boat you can find and note its date.
 - b. What does this image tell you about the Chinese and their relationship with the ocean?
3. Now search web images for swimming at Sanya beach, Hainan.
 - a. What does this show you about beach swimming in China?
 - b. Compare this to beach activities in Australia.
4. View this link: <http://magicseaweed.com/China-Surf-Forecast/78/> or search www.magicseaweed.com . Search Asia, Surf spots, China.
 - a. Note the number of identified surf spots.
 - b. Estimate the length of coastline encompassing by these locations.
 - c. Do you think this would be all of the possible locations?
5. Lets look at the source of the waves.
 - a. Name the seas and ocean near coastal China.
 - b. Estimate the size of the "fetch" in square kilometers.
 - c. Search web for Typhoons in China. Identify one and note its path.
 - d. Describe the impact of typhoons on wave creation and how surfers would view them.
 - e. This website shows current wind conditions affecting the surf coast. <http://passageweather.com>
6. Potential surfers – people near the surf coast. Find population numbers for the following places.
 - a. Guangzhou
 - b. Shenzhen
 - c. Dongguan
 - d. Foshan
 - e. Hainan
 - f. Hong Kong
7. Using Maps direction tab;
 - a. Make a rough calculation as to how long it would take many of these people to reach the coast.
 - b. Comment on the potential size of China's future surfing numbers.
8. The Surfers

This article is detailed but outlines the features of the G2 generation. <http://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/mapping-chinas-middle-class>

They are the group embracing surfing. They mainly come from the rising middle class in China.

Characteristics:

Born after mid 80's – Teenagers and early 20's

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Parents lived through shortages and austerity
Raised in relative abundance
Lived through the new era of economic reform
Confident
Independent minded
Often the only child
May have studied overseas.
Estimated 200 million of them

Video and photo study.

Look at the videos and photos and using you observations and the information you have obtained write 250 - 500 words outlining the impact the imported surfing culture is having and is likely to have in China.

Video Links

NOTE: View video at bottom of page below article and map first. <http://www.coastalwatch.com/surfing/latest-news/20497/chinese-authorities-to-replace-sawn-surfboard>

Photos by Milton Brown



Surf Coast ready for tourists



Government officials discuss contest site location



Heading to the contest



Contest site

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Opening ceremony. John Yang is 3rd from left



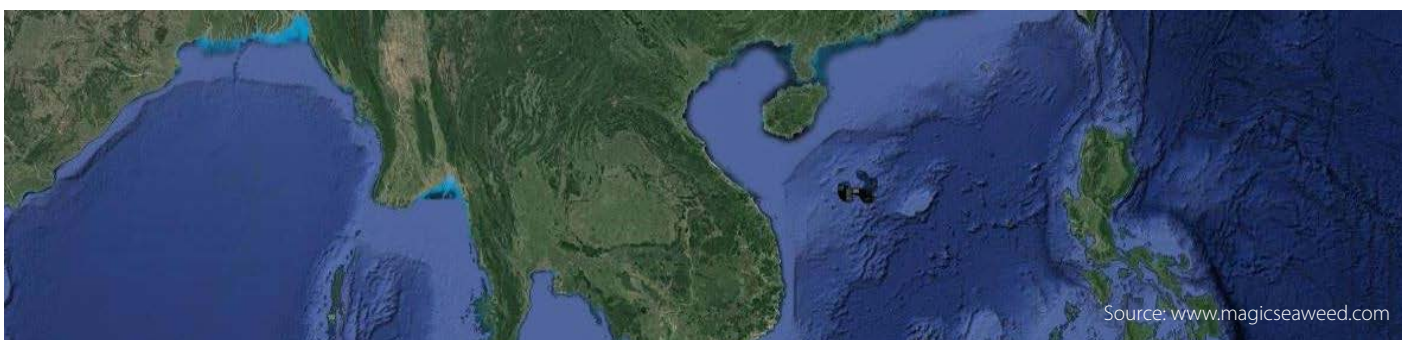
Girls' finals



Mens Finalis. John Yang in red



Longboard finalists



Source: www.magicseaweed.com