

# Ep.4.1 - Xinyu Wu

Mon, Feb 26, 2024 12:09PM 26:45

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

michigan, people, beijing, msu, work, program, years, international, visitors, connect, opportunity, focusing, exchange, strongest ally, world, relationship, michigan economic development, organizations, south asian countries, higher education

## SPEAKERS

Announcer, Xinyu Wu, Ed Clemente

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- A** Announcer 00:01  
Welcome to The Michigan Opportunity, an economic development discussion series featuring candid conversations with business leaders and innovators across Michigan. You'll hear firsthand accounts on how the state is driving job growth and business investment, supporting a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, building vibrant communities and helping to attract and retain one of the most diverse and talented workforces in the nation. And now, your host, Ed Clemente.
- E** Ed Clemente 00:29  
Hello, I'm your host, Ed Clemente, and welcome to the show. We're fortunate today to have Xinyu Wu, she's the director of Visiting International Professional Program at MSU. It's a lot of words. Welcome to the show first.
- X** Xinyu Wu 00:42  
Thank you. Thank you for having me.
- E** Ed Clemente 00:44  
Oh, it's my pleasure. I'm excited you're on. And what do you tell people kind of what you do in the quick speech first, you know, what do you tell people?
- X** Xinyu Wu 00:54  
Yeah, so it is a mouthful, a long title or VIPP. But essentially, we are a very special education unit within MSU. We're focusing on nondegree professional capacity development for

and with MSU. We're focusing on nondegree, professional capacity development for international visiting scholars, students, and the professionals of all walks of life. So for more than 30 years, we leverage MSU's academic resources as well as some of the very unique resources the state of Michigan offers to design and deliver professional training and exchange programs for our international talents, for international audiences. So in a way, I see the VIPP as a bridge, that we connect our visitors to knowledge, ideas, cultures, and opportunities. Also to the people of Michigan. We also like to see ourselves as a window through which our international partners including foreign government, agencies, universities, private businesses, individuals, they can see and enjoy the beauty of Michigan, the friendly people, the diverse cultures and vibrant businesses. So we want to help people to connect with Michigan become, not just to improve their professional skills, but also become a Michigander. So when they go back, because they are our graduates, they are our ambassadors, so they take a piece of Michigan back to their home country.

E

Ed Clemente 02:40

I think you know this already, but I'm on a similar kind of organization down in the Detroit area, Global Ties Detroit, which is more Southeast Michigan. But I find this to be, organizations like yours, and then Jodi Michaels, down in Kalamazoo, to be one of the more hidden gems of the state, because in today's crazy geopolitical world, this is like, some of the sanity that you see, because you find out people are just people, and they have the same issues around the world. Do you find that same experience? That it's always so much better for people to get to see each other in person?

X

Xinyu Wu 03:21

Absolutely. Thanks for mentioning Jodi in Kalamazoo and Marian in Detroit, they are great colleagues, great friends, we work together, collaboratively hosting many international professionals and visitors throughout the years. And as you said, the people-to-people exchange is really the core of what we do. Michigan especially, I think, it's so important for us to have this kind of opportunity to expose our resources, our expertise, our opportunities to international organizations and individuals. Unlike some of the coastal states in the US, we're probably not having that kind of high profile. We don't have like a mega city in New York or Chicago even, so for for us to be able to host visitors, providing them that opportunity to explore the states, either long term, some of our program as long as two years. And some as short as two days. Doesn't matter longer or shorter. We always try to put the right people, the right resources in front of our visitors so that they get really the right information, the right idea, the right opportunity, so that they can explore others working with us, or improve, taking some of the best practices back home to improve their own business practice. A lot of our participants, they are leaders of their organization, they are experts themselves, we also learn from them. So it's really a mutual exchange, they take best practice back home, they explore opportunities to work with us. Because they are leaders, they make decisions, business decisions, they influence policy. So that is really very powerful. When they, on a day to day basis, they work on a certain issue, they always remember, Okay, this is what we learned in Michigan, this is some of the ideas we got from Michigan, or sometimes it's bad. We are very honest, I will say, in programming. We do take them to see some of the case studies that were not successful, you know, there are things that we didn't get right, either as policy or science. And that's also fine. So we're very open, we expose them to all sorts of experience. And that's really just authentic experience, and that really stays very long. The other piece on people-to-

people exchange is really the long-term relationship. It's not possible sometimes within two days to strike a business deal, they will come to invest, or they will do whatever. It's that first impression, we want to get in and very deep. And we want to make it clear that this is a long-term relationship, friendship we're looking after. We want to keep that connection going. So even when our participants, our visitors go back home, we connect virtually and right now it's not that difficult, right? So we continue with that virtual connection, sharing information, helping them to connect to the right resources in Michigan, if they cannot manage when they are here in town, so that people to people exchange is super important, especially for us in Michigan, in the Midwest.

E

Ed Clemente 04:12

Can you just give a few highlights of some of the countries that you've had in recently or I don't know how long you've been at this job.

X

Xinyu Wu 07:33

So I've been here for eight years. And really, I'm very privileged to lead a very diverse and vibrant team here at MSU. In just 2023, last year, we hosted more than 320 international scholars and leaders from more than 60 countries. And so that's really a powerful program in terms of its short- and long-term impact. Just one example, this is actually an ongoing project, we were very fortunate to get selected by the US Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service Agency to run a two years long research capacity development program focusing on water for climate smart agriculture, for South Asia. So we just hosted eight research fellows from six South Asian countries including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, I think I'm forgetting one.

E

Ed Clemente 08:47

Bhutan? Was Bhutan in there?

X

Xinyu Wu 08:49

No, it's not Bhutan. So eight really talented researchers stayed three months here in East Lansing on campus. They just left before Christmas. So during their fellowship each is paired with an MSU faculty as their mentor for a water-focused project with the goal to improve food security for sustainable agriculture in their own community and in their own country. So throughout the fellowship in Michigan, they not only spend time with mentor and the faculty students here on campus in the lab, they also were connected with various organizations including the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, which is one of our strongest ally here. The Great Lake Climate Change Institute, weather processing companies in another, some even local wineries and farms. This kind of exchange helped to develop South Asian countries capacity in climate change adaptation, of course. But at the same time, those scholars are so well connected and integrated into the local community. They know their Sunday farmer's market, they know their local concert bands, they know the museum's. This is a longer term relationship, as I mentioned earlier that we created, and next year, 2024, our

MSU team is going to visit the eight fellows in their country and spending time in their community. So to enhance that relationship. And the long term goal is to foster further research collaboration that can potentially lead to solving some real problems in climate change.

A

Announcer 11:03

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E

Ed Clemente 11:25

Once again, our guest is Xinyu Wu, she's the director of Visiting International Professional Program at Michigan State University. On that last point you just made, you have so many different unique programs. I'm Michigan State graduate, so I know. We've had on this podcast, the FRIB, rare isotope beam program. And we've had on the Dean of Engineering, and we've had on just different folks, we've had the presidents of MSU before too. So are you in all those programs? I know agriculture is a big one, obviously for MSU. But do they also have meetings with engineers and things like that as well?

X

Xinyu Wu 12:04

Absolutely. Yeah. So we're focusing on really a number of semantic areas. Agriculture, obviously is a key one, because MSU, that's our strongest area, but we also work in education, working in civic engagement. We work in public health, we work with business, strategic leadership-type of program training program. We have civil engineering, computer science type of program. So it's a really very diverse program to capture the expertise we have here on campus and throughout the state.

E

Ed Clemente 12:55

I can just remember as a student, all those programs, and like all my friends, they are doing so many interesting things, and you were only like in your 20s or early 18-19. And it was just fascinating how diverse that university is. I know it's got some big programs, but it's also got some really unique individual programs. But I have a question for you, though. So how did you get to this job? You've been there eight years. What was your path to this position?

X

Xinyu Wu 13:28

Yes, it's actually a long winding road to get to where I am. I was born in Beijing. I grew up in the city in the 80s, which is a really fascinating time. That's the beginning of the opening up in China with very rapid economic development. So there was so many ideas, concepts, hopes and opportunities. That time in Beijing was just unbelievable. Right now, if I go back, I go back

still on a regular basis because my family, my parents are still in Beijing, I wouldn't even recognize the place. I would really have trouble navigating the city because it's just a completely different place. But I grew up and my mum, I will say is a typical Tiger Mom. Kind of forced or should I say encouraged me to learn so many different things, a lot of after school activity. I was attending a swimming school, a sports school for kids, and I was taking private violin tuition. So it was really quite busy as a young kid, and so I determined I really need to run away I need to escape. So I didn't stay in Beijing I went to Wuhan for my undergrad study. So I did computer science. And then I secured a scholarship to go to the UK for my PhD. So I did actually PhD in computer science, Applied Computer Science in the UK. Then I got into research, I was a faculty member for many years. Just really by chance, while I was working in London, I got involved in international higher education. And I thought, Oh, this is really what I'm passionate about, what I want to do, really helping international students, scholars, working on international exchange partnership. So that kind of moved away from being a academia researcher to a higher education administrator and manager. In 2015, my husband, you were asking earlier, who is German engineer, got a fabulous opportunity to move to Detroit, working for one of the companies here. So I was really fortunate this position was open. And here I am, eight years later, just enjoying every day of my work. Yeah, and feel bringing change to the program, bringing change to the scholars and to their life. So just really feel fortunate to be where I am.

E

Ed Clemente 16:36

Yeah, I was actually in Beijing about six years ago. And I remember because everyone said, Oh, go to the hutongs. You know, they're so interesting. And there weren't many left. We found some but it's really developing like you said.

X

Xinyu Wu 16:51

Exactly. So I grew up in hutong. [Oh, you did?] Yeah, I did.

E

Ed Clemente 16:55

Oh, okay. Once you tell people what it is, because they might not know.

X

Xinyu Wu 16:59

So it's like a narrow alleyway with little houses, it's not high rises. Typically just one floor. It's basically like a bungalow. And it's a little nice courtyard, but it's not as neat as you sometimes imagine, or saw in movies because of overdevelopment. A courtyard was supposed to be just one family living and it ended up three or four family sharing. So the condition was not that great, but super fun, because you have the neighbor right next to each other. So the neighbor kids, typically after dinner, those time in the 80s, there's not, you know, TV was not widely available. I don't remember watching TV every night. It's really just playing games or chasing each other. Kind of the old days, yes, that's the old days.

E

Ed Clemente 17:01

It reminded me of almost like a little village, little villages in the middle of a big city.

X

Xinyu Wu 18:11

Everyone is close to everyone. Everyone knows everyone. People helping each other. I remember there was a huge earthquake in, I think, the late 70s, I was just about to start school as a little girl. And we ended up staying in the street for almost a month. Because some of the houses were damaged. And now to me, that was heaven. Because it's like a sleepover for 30 days, kids getting together, family all getting together. So it was super fun. I cannot imagine that happening again, anymore.

E

Ed Clemente 18:55

Once again, our guest is Xinyu Wu. She's the director of Visiting International Professional Program at MSU. So a couple of questions, like, what do you see? And then if you could, you can use examples for this. But as say, the future trends that you see for like, obviously the world is changing all the time, but international sort of exchanges like this, do you see different patterns?

X

Xinyu Wu 19:22

Absolutely. I think we all know, and like it or not, we are living in a world powered by AI right now. Right? Information and knowledge is really readily available. And what does that mean to learning, including higher education? What does success look like for individuals and organizations in the next five years, 10 years, it's a really fascinating time. Because, you know, I'm working in higher education. So I'm just focusing on my field. I think there's three trends when it comes to higher education, including professional training programs like mine, there's three trends. One is really the critical, creative and the analytical thinking is going to be super important, more important than ever. The ability of acquiring new knowledge and then applying it for problem solving is going to be the key, is going to be something that as education, institution, educators to focus on, it's not just about the transfer knowledge, it's really about creating that ability, helping our students, our participant to acquire that ability. So it's critical, creative and analytical thinking. The second thing is about connectivity. So we are increasingly living in a virtual, super-connected world. Right now, you are, I don't know, sitting somewhere.

E

Ed Clemente 20:59

In Detroit area.

X

Xinyu Wu 21:00

Yeah, I'm in East Lansing. So we are 100 miles apart away, really just one click, two click, we are connected. So we are really super connected, but in the virtual world, and the young kids, young professionals, they're living in this virtual world. Of course, we enjoy the convenience,

the efficiency and the flexibility. But that emotional and the personal connection, and the relationship that, based on real understanding, will actually determine one's success. And I think this is why this type of program, my program is super important. We really bring people together, we talk about the people to people's connection. And that connection is not just people like us, it's people very different. Coming from different backgrounds, speaking different language, have different culture, different ideas, approaching issues very differently, how to connect with them, with real meaning and develop that relationship and be able to work together. That's really the second trend in education. The last one is actually individuality. From where I can see, because most people like a highly personalized experience now. They don't want to waste time on something that's not relevant. So this is something that we, as an education institution, as a program, need to focus on how we can provide that individual personalized experience. So those will be the three things the VIPP as a program, going forward, very pay a lot of attention.

E

Ed Clemente 22:43

You sort of you actually answered one of my next questions anyway. So good job, but it was, what advice would you give to somebody career wise, and you kind of explored that, and at least two of those. And the last thing is because you've lived in Michigan now eight years, what do you like best about living in Michigan?

X

Xinyu Wu 23:00

One word, the space. I love the space. I talked about how the hutong was so crowded growing up in Beijing. And then I lived in the UK for 25 years and in Europe, space is also very precious. When I first came to Michigan, and I was just so impressed by the space. Everything is big. The parking spaces are huge. For me to worry about scratching my car or other people's car, I can park blindfolded, no issue. So the space really is something I really enjoy and I think because of that space it's reflected in the Michiganders character. People are open minded, open to new ideas, ready to accept newcomers. So I was certainly made to feel very accepted. Very welcome. Here, of course on campus, but throughout the state, I just really love the place.

E

Ed Clemente 24:12

Well, you're doing a great job there. I should mention, our guest is Xinyu Wu, she's the director of Visiting International Professional Program at Michigan State University. I know everyone says you do a good job there. and you're doing a lot of difference, I know with the groups we've exchanged with, even with the Detroit ones. And if you ever need help with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, I'm sure you've probably called on us once in a while.

X

Xinyu Wu 24:39

Absolutely. We have a number of speakers on a regular basis from MEDC. We also work with LEAP. That's the Lansing Area Economic Partnership. From their CEO to COO. They are our strongest ally. I mentioned some of the State Department, the Lansing, and the East Lansing Mayor's team, including the mayor's themselves, and they were our guest speakers on a

regular basis, and they enjoy to be on campus interacting with our international students and scholars. So welcoming the visitors to their city. So we love to work with them. So our program's success, you mentioned that we're very successful, and thank you for that, and I think that success really relies on our partners. And I mentioned quite a few and a lot of NGOs, local organizations, Allen Neighborhood, Cristo Rey, RDC, we cannot do what we do without their strong support.

E

Ed Clemente 25:57

Well, thanks again, Xinyu. We also want to say xie xie nin.

X

Xinyu Wu 26:02

Thank you.

E

Ed Clemente 26:03

That's all I remember, that and ni hao. Anyway, thanks again. Keep up the good work, and hopefully I'll meet you in person someday.

X

Xinyu Wu 26:12

Yeah, thank you so much.

E

Ed Clemente 26:14

Join us next week as our guest is gonna be Danny Ellis. Danny is the CEO of SkySpecs. They inspect wind turbines on six different continents and are based here in Michigan.

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Announcer 26:25

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