

Awards and Citations

Response by Jingmai O'Connor for the presentation of the 2019 Schuchert Award of the Paleontological Society



If you were to go to my high school reunion and say hey, did you know that Jingmai O'Connor is a successful paleontologist now? Everyone would be like... who? I'm not kidding, even with a name like mine! The fact is, it wasn't until I discovered paleontology in college and started grad school, that I finally had the drive to be anything more than mediocre. It's really incredible what a person can accomplish when they find something they are both able to do... and passionately love doing.

It is such an honor to be here before you all this evening, many thanks to the Paleontological Society for selecting me. It really means so much, especially because I am fully aware of how many brilliant and talented young paleontologists there are out there to choose from. To all my peers, passionately expanding the landscape of our knowledge to the best of their abilities, you all deserve to be standing here beside me tonight. I couldn't be half the scientist I am now if it wasn't for a wonderful community of colleagues.

I know that in large part the reason it is me standing here before you is because of the incredible fossils that I have had the good fortune to work on, specimens that I didn't collect myself but that others have generously given me access to. If it wasn't for these exceptional specimens that practically write

themselves up, I doubt I would be here today. None of us would, so a toast, to the fossils!

But even with amazing fossils, I wouldn't be able to mine their precious data if it wasn't for the incredible mentors that I've had every step along the way. From my undergraduate advisor Donald Prothero who first sparked my passion for paleontology, introduced me to research, and brought me to my first GSA, to my graduate advisors David Bottjer and Luis Chiappe who imparted more than wisdom, but also gave me the encouragement I needed to overcome obstacles and some of my own weaknesses so that I could complete my degree, and to my current boss at the IVPP Zhou Zhonghe who gives me carte blanche to pursue my research in whichever direction the fossil evidence takes me. I'm so lucky to have such wonderful teachers who have only ever lifted me higher.

I am truly grateful to everyone who has supported me along the way, in ways big and small. With tales of academic bullying and other forms of negativity unfortunately increasingly common, I am aware that not everyone has had it so good. It is for this reason that I am also passionate about supporting students and young researchers in any way I can—I know how much of a difference it makes to have excellent guidance and I do my best to pass on that experience.

And last but definitely not least, great advisors aside, I would not have gotten anywhere at all if not for the incredible love and support of my wonderful family, a few of whom are here with me today. I love you guys so so much, thank you for loving me even in my darkest hours!

My success is truly a product of humanity and the scientific community at its best, and thus the success belongs to all of us. In all our actions, let us all 'be excellent to each other' and create a better future for the individual, for the scientific community, and for the world. Thank you!

Photo credit: Jesse Goldberg, from *When Whales Walked*

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