

My Scientist's Dream and the Hundred-Talent Program

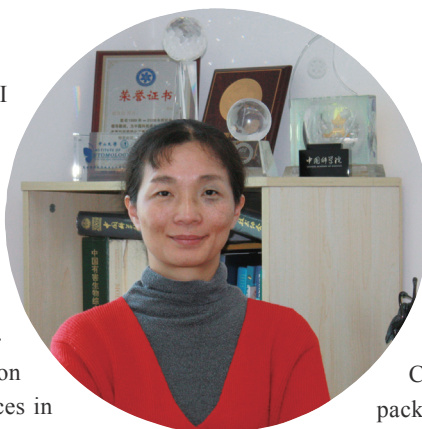
On the bookshelf of my office I have always kept several trophy cups. They are honors from my research career, the witnesses which see me through highs and lows over the years. Among them, there is one I cherish the most: the Outstanding Performance Award of the Hundred-Talent Program, which was conferred on me by the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 2002. This award has a special meaning for me because without it, my dream to become a scientist in China wouldn't have come true.

I remember well that as a kid, I was a big fan of science. In 1978, I became one of the first students to be admitted to a key local middle school after the Cultural Revolution. Back then, we were fervent young learners. Every noon, one of our teachers would read us *Goldbach's Conjecture*, a popular reportage at that time which depicts the legendary life of mathematician CHEN Jingrun. As I recall those moments, I still can't help feeling inspired and wondering how those little seeds were planted in my heart to be a scientist like Chen.

My passion for science grew even stronger after I read Erwin Schrodinger's *What Is Life* during high school. I became especially interested in life sciences, and regarded it as one of the most important undertakings for human beings in the 21st century. Upon entering Wuhan University as an undergraduate, I chose virology as my major, in the hope of revealing the secret origin of life by studying the smallest biological forms on Earth.

I came to the Institute of Virology, Chinese Academy of Science in 1986 to work on my master's program, and joined the institute as a research assistant after graduation. In 1993, I was sponsored by the Marie Curie Fellowship to study at the Wageningen Agricultural University, first as a visiting scholar then as a PhD candidate. After five years of commuting between Wageningen and Wuhan, I earned my PhD degree, and turned down a couple of postdoc invitations from Canada, determined to go back to China.

Upon my return, however, I found myself confronted with a series of challenges. First and foremost it was the



funding shortage. As a PI, I had only 3,000 dollars on my books, and it was by no means easy to get quick and generous research grants in a short time.

When I was under such financial pressure, CAS officially kicked off the Hundred-Talent Program as the nation's first recruitment program to lure overseas Chinese scientists to work in China. The package it was offering included a 320,000 dollar worth of startup fund. It came so timely that I decided to apply for the program at once. The application process turned out to be very smooth; I was lucky enough to become one of the first recruits of this distinguished program.

The Hundred-Talent Program played a decisive role in my research career. It provided me with a decent sum of money so that I was able to start my projects, my own lab and research team, which has been expanding steadily over the years. Among other things, we were able to buy better experiment facilities and reagents, and I didn't have to worry about money shortage for a long time.

With the Program's support, our research on the cotton bollworm (*Heliothis armigera*) baculovirus pesticides achieved remarkable progress. Our team was the first to report the whole genome sequence of the HaSNPV. Via genetic recombination, we managed to improve its lethal time from 83 hours to between 65 and 73 hours.

In 2000, I was appointed director general of my institute, and received another major research grant from the Ministry of Science and Technology. On November 28, 2002, the Outstanding Performance Award of the Hundred-Talent Program was presented for the first time in Beijing. As one of the 15 recipients, I was so proud to take over the trophy cup from then CAS President LU Yongxiang!

Every time I see the cup on my bookshelf, it reminds me of the challenges I once went through and inspires me to push forward. If I have been working hard to fulfill my scientist's dream, it is the Hundred-Talent Program that played a key role in making my dream come true. (*Based on Dr. HU Zhihong's essay, originally written in Chinese, which is dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Hundred-Talent Program*)