

## 4.17 Guiding Chinese Scientists to Germany

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It must have been in September 1999, that I travelled to Zittau to attend a cosy little conference on fuzzy logic. Zittau is the small city in the most south-eastern corner of Germany neighbouring Poland and the Czech Republic. The conference was not the only reason to go there, but also that my father's family originates from a town nearby. On the conference's first day I went to my hotel's breakfast room. Having had already long-term relations to China, particularly Hong Kong, and with many Chinese people, I sat down on the table of a Chinese looking man. As expected, he was an attendant of the conference as well – it was Da Ruan.

We started to talk about our respective backgrounds, our relations to China and our research interests. Da told me that he went to China each summer, not only to visit his family, but also to give lectures and, most importantly, to search for candidates he could hire as postdoctoral fellows to work with him at the Belgian nuclear research centre. Postdocs – this approach raised my interest. Why bothering around with doctoral students who still need a great deal of support, especially when it comes to formulating their papers and theses? I thought it was a good idea to work with more mature and experienced people. In order to try it myself, I asked Da to keep in mind during his next scan for talents in China that I was also prepared to host a postdoc. And Da delivered sooner than expected.

In the summer of 2000, Da returned to his hometown Shanghai, and in the course of this he gave lectures at Shanghai Jiaotong University. One of his students there was Zhao Yi, who was to defend her PhD thesis just a few months later. Da identified her as a candidate for his personal “postdoc programme”. Then, his plans happened to change. In 2001, he would leave Mol for a sabbatical with the nuclear research facility in the Norwegian city of Halden. Therefore, he suggested to me to look into the possibility of hosting Zhao Yi as a postdoc in Hagen.

Since I had made a bad experience with a Chinese student before, I decided to meet Zhao Yi in person before inviting her to Germany. As I was spending some time in Hong Kong around Chinese New Year 2001, we agreed to meet in Shenzhen on 1 February. It was a grey, hazy morning that I crossed the border to mainland China and walked the short distance to the Shangri-la Hotel. I had just sat down in the lobby and prepared to read the papers brought along, when a young couple stood up from a couch nearby and approached me. It was Zhao Yi with her husband Shi Jianliang, whom she had married just two weeks earlier, but of whose existence I did not know. We talked for two hours before we went up to the hotel's rotating restaurant to have lunch. Being the only guests there, all waiters came together to observe a very special intercultural exchange: I showed Shi Jianliang how to eat long noodles the Italian way with fork and spoon.

First, it appeared difficult to me having to host two persons now instead of one. But the solution came by itself. In April I received a letter from a research institute in Duisburg, not too far away from Hagen, which was looking for people with exactly Shi Jianliang's expertise. The rest was extremely easy: I called the letter's signee, Prof. Thomas Kaiser, he met the couple in Shanghai the same summer and they came to Germany in November 2001. After having lived for four years in Duisburg, they moved to Nuremberg where Dr. Shi took on a new job. The couple has now two daughters, Zhao Yi became a German and is still working with me.

Also still working with me since exactly the same time, and also put in contact with by Da Ruan is Prof. Li Zhong. Da's first FLINS conference in 1994 was attended by Prof. Ren Ping of Jinan University in Guangzhou, who recommended Li Zhong as his best MSc student at that time. In turn, Da invited Li Zhong to come to Mol as a visiting scientist. Although this visit never materialized due to first administrative difficulties and later Da's sabbatical in Halden, between 1996 and 2001 they co-operated rather intensively by correspondence. In early summer 2001, Da brought me in contact with Li Zhong, who had moved as a postdoc to Yonsei University in Seoul after having obtained his PhD from South China University of Technology in Guangzhou. Impressed by Li Zhong's scientific achievements and his extraordinary potential, I immediately strove to bring him to Hagen as a visiting scientist, although our research areas do not coincide. This could easily be achieved, because at that time we had a well-funded Sino-German exchange project. Later Li Zhong became an Alexander von Humboldt research fellow and a professor, as well as a father of a son and a German citizen.

The third Chinese person joining my group in autumn 2001 was Zhang Wei. Needless to say, that the contact with him came about via Da, and via one of Zhang Wei's colleagues at Southwest Jiaotong University in Chengdu who had been a visitor in Mol. After obtaining his PhD in early 2006, Zhang Wei stayed in Germany and found a job in industry. He also became a German citizen. With his wife and daughter he lives now in Hamburg, where he is responsible for issues of functional safety in a company manufacturing wind power systems.

My relation to this book's editor was spawned, in turn, by one of the contacts above Da had established: During a FLINS conference in Belgium, Li Zhong met Prof. Jie Lu and raised her interest in my chair. Her first visit in 2007, and now she is a Mercator Visiting Professor.