

East, West, Home Is Best

Growing number of overseas Chinese choose to return to their home country and pursue their careers

In his 12th year in the United States, Zheng Chunyang hit a ceiling. Zheng, a 42-year-old Chinese scientist in the application of biomedical sciences, got his master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Rochester and pursued post-doctoral studies at Cornell University.

"Progress was gradual with an annual increase in salary. That's what life was all about there," Zheng said. He also found it difficult to think and live as an American. "I didn't grow up with American football," Zheng said.

Because of a talent project of China, Zheng got a chance to return to his home country in 2010. Launched in 2008, the project mainly provides assistance for native talent studying or working overseas to come back to China and further their research and entrepreneurship. Zheng received 4 million yuan (\$633,443) as a start-up grant from

the government.

He founded Robustnique Corp. Ltd. in the Tianjin Binhai New Area in 2010. Everything was built from scratch as he led his team in the development of dozens of tool enzymes which were then taken up by researchers and other brands. Through innovative achievements, Zheng also established a successful brand selling skin care products that have since become popular among Chinese customers. The profitability of these popular products is helping the company further their other areas of research.

This year, Zheng's achievements saw him nominated as a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), China's top political advisory body. At the annual session of the 13th CPPCC National Committee held

in March, Zheng came up with a proposal on the development of the cosmetic industry. In his opinion, the domestic cosmetics are high in safety but must improve in advanced technology. He also suggested that the government guide the industry to increase investment in research and development (R&D).

A golden era

In 2008, two years prior to Zheng's homecoming, 40-year-old Liu Yi quit a senior position and a comfortable life in the United States and returned to China to further his career, as the environmental protection industry was just emerging in the country.

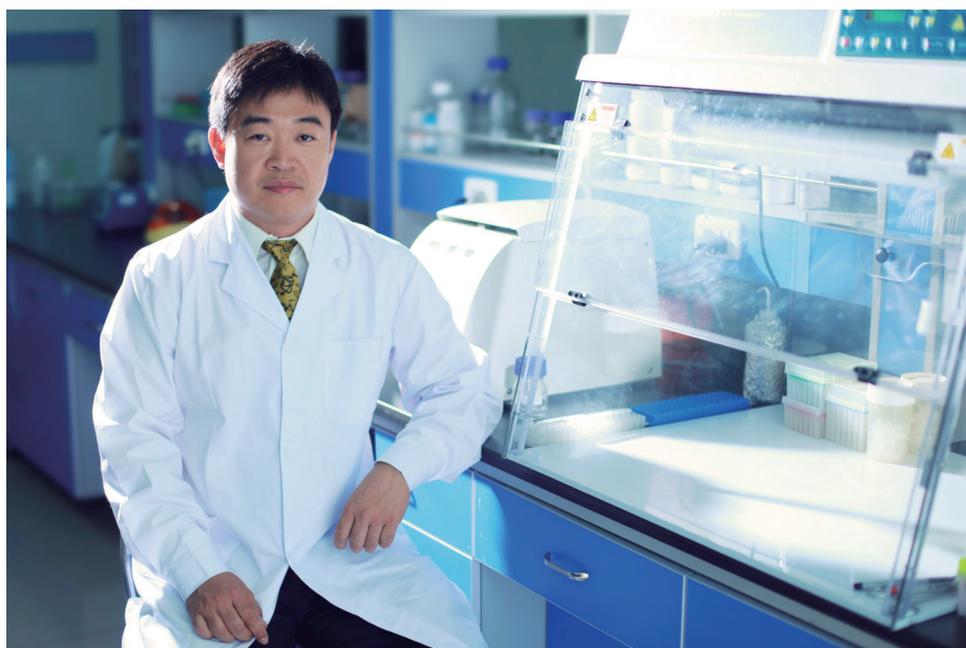
Ten years later, Liu believes he got the timing just right with his return. "It's a golden era for startups here in China," he said.

Having attained his master's and doctoral degrees in engine energy saving and emission reduction in the United States, he spotted a high demand for exhaust treatment in China as well as a huge market.

"As the number of automobiles in China increased, pollution would get worse," Liu said. He then founded Act Blue, a company specializing in exhaust treatment, in east China's Anhui Province shortly after he got back.

In the initial period it was hard to make ends meet due to the small size of the market, as well as the high cost of R&D and a shortage of equipment and trained professionals, which together applied mounting pressure to Liu.

In spite of these challenges, he refused to accept a venture capital investment of 45 million yuan (\$7.13 million) from investors who demanded he lower the emission threshold. Liu wouldn't be swayed, believing it of vital importance to make the perfect product from



Zheng Chunyang at a laboratory in his company in the Binhai New Area in Tianjin



Liu Yi (left) introduces the latest technology developed by his company to an inspection group in August 2015

the very beginning.

The difficulties were far greater than expected, but Liu never lost faith in his original decision.

"What touched me is that the government offered great support, which helped our company to survive many difficulties," Liu said.

Noticing his predicament, the Anhui provincial government provided a loan of 20 million yuan (\$3 million) and offered him a building for his factory as well as housing facilities for employees.

After nine years of hard work, Act Blue has developed a series of engine exhaust purification products targeting diesel, gasoline and natural gas.

"Our products can remove 95 percent of main pollutants from a car's exhaust," Liu said. "Our partners include not only top Chinese car makers, but also industry giants from the United States and Japan."

"I truly believe that one's personal career should be consistent with the requirements of the era, and then you will make it," Liu said.

This January Liu became a CPPCC National Committee member, and he is glad for the responsibility and opportunity to participate

in the administration of state affairs.

Liu was pleased to hear that this year's Report on the Work of the Government revealed plans to address the excess emissions of diesel trucks in 2018, which will be another way forward in the battle against pollution.

"The report made a summary of China's work over the past five years, and laid out a blueprint for the future. In fact, it was in many ways like my own work report about what I have done in the past and what I plan to do in the future," Liu said.

Growing trend

In the past few years, Zheng has been impressed by China's entrepreneurial environment. "Those talent- and entrepreneurship-oriented policies can streamline procedures with related departments also keen to help," he said, particularly in the five years after the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012.

In the 2018 Government Work Report, both Chinese with experience studying overseas and foreign talent are encouraged to start businesses in China.

"Many overseas Chinese are now looking

for a chance to come back," Zheng said. "The trend has changed."

Some 432,500 people came back to China after studying overseas in 2016, a 58.48-percent increase on 2012, according to a report published by the Ministry of Education in January 2017.

In 2002, the second year after China's joining in the World Trade Organization, the ratio of people who had gone abroad to those who had returned was around 7:1, while in the year 2010 the ratio was closer to 2:1, according to *China Youth Daily*. It stood at 1.28:1 in 2015.

"China's development depended on a demographic advantage in the past, while in the coming 30 years, our growth will rely on talented people and trained professionals," said Wang Huiyao, Director General of the Center for China and Globalization.

In the 1960s, thousands of Chinese scientists gave up good living conditions and sound research environments to come back and made significant contributions to the country's development in science, economy and defense. This is regarded as the first major wave of returning overseas Chinese.

Their spirit continues to affect younger generations today. In Liu's opinion, "Every generation has their mission. The past is already gone; the future is ours."

"In the past, people would talk about how much a returned scientist had sacrificed for the development of his country. But times have changed. Now we can pursue our careers and at the same time live a better life," Zheng said. ■



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