



Dr. Xin Ma has expanded the Bayer research network in Asia

At home in the world

For over 10 years, Dr. Xin Ma has traveled through the Bayer Group and gained experience of various cultures and different strategies. She is familiar with the entire value creation chain at Bayer HealthCare, from drug discovery and development through to strategy definition and portfolio management. In the summer of 2009, the chemist returned to her homeland, China, and set up the Global Drug Discovery Innovation Center China for Bayer – a pioneering achievement in her native country and an important contribution to top-class research and Bayer HealthCare's Asia strategy.

Xin Ma loves a challenge. And although the Bayer researcher was born and raised in China, after a total of 20 years abroad she felt a bit like a stranger coming back to her own country and almost a little lost. "I was really surprised to see how much had changed: the cities looked far more modern, and the people were much more open," says the delicate, dark-eyed Asian woman. Ma left China in December 1987 and began her long journey through the world of research – stopping off in all kinds of places along the way. In 2009, when she began setting up the new Global Drug Discovery Innovation Center China (GDD ICC) in the country's capital, Beijing, she had to find her bearings again, both on Asian soil and in the Chinese research establishment. "Sometimes I felt as helpless as a child," says the much-traveled research manager, looking back on her experiences with a laugh. It didn't take her long to find her feet, though: this feisty and committed scientist soon made GDD ICC into a permanent element of the international Bayer HealthCare

R&D center. China joins Germany and the USA as the third country in which the Bayer HealthCare Pharmaceuticals Division brings outstanding researchers together from all over the world to work on innovative treatments and develop new active ingredients.

Constant change characterizes business in China

Even though a great deal is known about China, its people and its working environment, Ma says that no-one should presume to know everything there is to know about her fellow-countrymen. She is convinced that "even people who were born in China but lived outside China for some time, like myself, are wrong to think they know China well." And she is talking from personal experience: "Whether it is a potential collaboration partner or a company – all of them act in very different ways. If we have signed a contract with one institution, it doesn't necessarily mean that we now know how to set up a new partnership with another research asso-

ciation." Ma has an idea why that might be: unlike Europe and North America, the working environment in China is still changing rapidly. "Many practices are not yet as standardized as they are in Germany, for example," she says. At the same time, she is constantly surprised by the enormous pace of change in her native country. Ma loves change and unexpected problems: "I'm motivated by new tasks: I hate a dull day at the office." There was no lack of challenges facing Ma in China: with four colleagues – scientists from Germany, the United States and Asia – she set up the Innovation Center China practically from scratch. "All we brought was a few ideas from Germany and a small group of motivated people." First they had to create the entire infrastructure for a research center, make contact with

Research journey: after numerous international postings within the Bayer Group, Dr. Xin Ma is currently working at Bayer HealthCare in Berlin and likes to spend her breaks visiting historic places like the Gendarmenmarkt (photo, left). Ma (photo right, 4th from left) has worked with particular dedication to network the company with renowned Asian research institutes like the Shanghai Institute of Organic Chemistry (SIOC) – and has thus also advanced Bayer HealthCare's strategy for Asia.



potential partners and acquaint themselves with the innovation environment in China. But initial successes did not take long to arrive. "We had a few good contacts, which enabled us to start up several projects in collaboration with the famous Tsinghua University in Beijing in the first year alone." Step by step, an expertise network quickly grew: for instance, a collaboration agreement was signed with the Institute of Biomedicine at Tsinghua University to support early-stage research focusing on oncology.

new countries, posts and duties. These days she has little problem adjusting, and that sometimes surprises even herself:

Different cultures are part of her life

"Different cultures, changing responsibilities, new work environments are part of my life – whichever continent my office is on. It's just another new day at work." For example, she started her advanced research work towards her

combination of people with the right attitude always makes things easier." This example has influenced Ma's management style. "At least, the principle inspired me, but it isn't always easy to put into practice," she sums up modestly. However, as soon as she talks about former staff members, it becomes clear how much this Asian scientist cares for her team: even years later, she's still in touch with many of them. Employees like Dr. Xin Ma are becoming increasingly important for global corpo-



Postings on a scientific career: with the full support of her parents (photo, left), Dr. Xin Ma devoted herself to gaining her master's degree in organic chemistry (2nd photo from left). She gained her first experiences abroad as a scholarship student at the Max Planck Institute in Mülheim an der Ruhr (3rd photo from left). Today, the Bayer scientist (large photo, right) is at home all over the world and is familiar with numerous cultures, because traveling is also one of her favorite private activities. And dialog with colleagues and co-workers (small photo, right) is one of Xin Ma's top priorities.

Other strategic partnerships followed, including a partnership with the People's Liberation Army General Hospital, whose scientists with expertise in the area of women's health have collaborated with the Bayer research site in Berlin since July 2010. The Shanghai Institute of Organic Chemistry (SIOC) also renewed a research agreement on chemical synthesis in March 2010.

Throughout her career, this Chinese scientist has familiarized herself with

Ph.D. degree in Europe through a scholarship with the Max Planck Society in Germany. She then spent two years at the State University of New York for her postgraduate research. Here, in the United States, this chemist with a passion for drug development and enhancement of chemical processes took up her first job in industry, with U.S. consumer and pharmaceutical goods manufacturer Procter & Gamble (P&G). "I learned early on from my boss at P&G how important it is to realize the full potential of each team member – because it is that which makes a high performing team. Having the right com-

rations. Ma likes people – and the differences between them: "Understanding another way of getting things done is particularly important in an international team: it helps us to generate creative solutions."

When she has the time, the committed scientist sits down with a cup of green tea and reflects on the various nationalities she has come to know over the years: while Germans take a situation as it comes, she thinks, the Chinese tend to need a "feel-good experience" – and in the United States they place a great deal of emphasis on political correctness. Since she began her



career with Bayer HealthCare in 1998, Ma has worked in all kinds of different areas: in West Haven, Connecticut, she worked mainly on the discovery and development of new drugs for diabetes and oncology and then took a post in corporate development with Bayer AG in Leverkusen – an opportunity she is happy to have had which helped her to find and develop new “muscles” outside of R&D she did not know existed in her.

When Professor Andreas Busch, Head of Global Drug Discovery, eventually suggested that she should set up the new Innovation Center in Beijing, she accepted the challenge. And thanks to her dynamism, the Global Drug Discovery Innovation Center China has become an important part of the subgroup’s Asia strategy. After her stint in Emerging Markets, our Asian colleague returned to Germany and joined the Strategy and Portfolio Management department for General Medicine in Berlin in June 2011. “I now have the opportunity to add the last link in the value creation chain which finishes the process from an idea to a marketed drug: the commercial marketing of products and portfolio management.”

Ma has always thought it important to have an eye for the big picture – “and to make something new from scratch.”

This motivated her to study chemistry and chemical engineering. “Even as a child, I loved watching a yellow liquid turn blue,” says the researcher, who was born in Wuhan, a city in southern China on the Yangtze River. “There’s something magical about it.” Full of enthusiasm, she talks about the reagents, vials and pieces of apparatus that her older brother brought home for his little sister from his work in an analytical laboratory.

Hydrochloric acid experiments in youthful over-confidence

In time, however, her experiments grew more dangerous. Once, in her parents’ bathroom, she mixed hydrochloric and sulfuric acid and the mixture exploded. The corrosive liquid splashed her face. “Luckily, it didn’t leave any scars,” she says, wondering at her own youthful over-confidence. Ma’s interest in chemistry had been awakened and it has never left her: “I wanted to know exactly what was happening.” Her undergraduate dissertation at the Dalian University of Technology in China was devoted to synthetic polymers, and for her master’s degree she focused entirely on organic chemistry – and thus laid the groundstone for a career in the chemicals industry.

Ma is now quietly waiting to see where her journey through the company will take her. She is aware that constant change awaits the company in the future, “but we will get better and better at dealing with it – I want my experience to help with that.” Only one thing is certain in the near future: “When I have more time, I would like to explore Berlin.” A great deal has changed since her first visit, before the fall of the Berlin Wall, but as a traveler between worlds, Xin Ma is accustomed to change.

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