MOVERS

Ren Wang, director, Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, Washington DC

2000–07: Deputy director-general for research, International Rice Research Institute, Manila, Philippines
1994–2000: Vice-president, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Beijing, China
1993–95: Deputy director of programme development, International Institute of Biological Control, Ascot, UK

Ren Wang understands the importance of seizing an opportunity. As a farm worker during China's Cultural Revolution, he was given two choices: either go to an agricultural college or work in construction. His choice landed him in the plant-protection research division at Shanxi Agricultural University in Taigu.

A postgraduate at the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) Institute of Biological Control in Beijing, Wang studied the use of beneficial insects. A PhD fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation then took him to Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg, where he became an expert in the control of exotic weeds.

After returning to the CAAS to continue studying the use of insects in weed control, Wang continued US–China collaborations, eventually helping to set up a joint biological-control research institute. Soon afterwards, Chinese policy moved towards commercializing research.

"I didn't want to commercialize rice, so I looked for opportunities to continue pure research," says Wang. Asked by the director of Britain's International Institute of Biological Control for personnel recommendations, Wang offered himself and became its deputy director.

Lured back to China as vice-president of the CAAS, Wang supervised 10,000 staff. One of his major projects was a Sino–Japan Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

Moving to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), an international public–private partnership that oversees 15 research centres, Wang became deputy director-general for research at the CGIAR's International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines. There he fostered collaborative initiatives between sub-Saharan Africa and central Asia.

After seven years, Wang has now become the CGIAR's director. He plans to address challenges such as climate change, poverty in Africa and South Asia and the effect of biofuel production on small farms. "If we can build strong collaborations, we'll form an unprecedented force to address such continued, pressing issues," says Wang.

His colleagues value his commitment to strengthening the CGIAR's research institutions. Robert Zeigler, director-general of the IRRI, says Wang understands the importance of decent infrastructure, a steady stream of exchanges and a critical mass of resources to address complex problems.

"I am an enabler," says Wang. "I want to develop the infrastructure that enables scientists to develop innovations." ■

Virginia Gewin

NETWORKS & SUPPORT

Careers on the move

Do European scientists need to be mobile in order to have successful careers? The Young European Biotech Network's Careers in Life Sciences (CiLS) working group conducted a study to investigate why fledgling scientists considered moving abroad. The European Job Migration Project began in 2005 with a survey of 900 students, professors and industry professionals from 70 countries (see *Nature* **435,** 709; 2005), continuing in 2006 with 20 follow-up testimonials about aspirations and attitudes.

Our analyses indicate a substantial 'brain circulation' (temporary international moves) in the European life sciences and help to identify drivers of international mobility. People planning to move to another country place importance on living conditions and total compensation packages, rather than on high salaries alone. Results from 2005 suggest that those most interested in going abroad want either to move to Britain or the United States, or are interested only in moving within continental Europe. The 2006 data suggest a connection between the wish to improve language skills and the country of choice; about 70% of those wanting to move to Britain or the United States were not native English speakers. People who have had previous experience abroad (especially internships) have greater interest in furthering their career internationally. According to the 2005 survey, men and women have roughly equal interest in working abroad; but men take longer stays. In the 2006 study, women mention family reasons as a motivator to stay in or return to their home country. People recruited by job agencies go abroad significantly less frequently than those who find work through newspapers or the Internet.

These results have provided a new direction for the CiLS. We are initiating a survey to find out what skills young scientists consider valuable. We will also interview life-science companies, such as drug firms, consultancies, biotechs and financial institutions. We'll examine how often scientists see moves abroad as permanent, and the perceived value of moves in terms of new skills, knowledge and contacts. We'll investigate how the amount of time spent abroad and the stage of career affect people's plans. Given the extensive, contentious discussions about career mobility in Europe, we hope the project will help to identify key factors driving and impeding European scientific careers. ■

Emilia Danilowicz is a member of the Careers in Life Sciences project team.

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POSTDOC JOURNAL

Small advantages

Since returning to work after having a child, I have been thinking a lot about what I will do after my fellowship. I am lucky to have friends in different career paths that I can talk to.

One of my friends had a baby the same week I did, and I asked her about how she will adjust in her job as a new mother. She is a tenured professor in environmental studies at a small private college. It offers flexibility, supportive colleagues and positive student interactions. Of course she faces some challenges, such as trying to do meaningful and successful research projects with undergraduates. At a small college one can't be too specialized, so she mentors thesis projects in a wide range of subjects, not necessarily in her area of expertise. Teaching institutions require a lot of grading, so over-scheduling is common. But hers is very family friendly, allowing her to take a full year off and work part-time when she returns.

For some, small private colleges are a perfect solution to the 'research versus teaching' quandary, as they provide healthy doses of both. Nice towns, small schools, long-term faculty and teaching opportunities await those who choose this path. It seems that small colleges afford you greater flexibility as long as you can remain flexible in your goals as well. It's good to know such opportunities exist, although I am still not sure I will follow that route. ■

Moira Sheehan is a postdoc in the Department of Plant Breeding and Genetics at Cornell University.