FROM BIG PHARMA CAREERS TO RISKY START-UP OPPORTUNITIES
MEET CHINA'S BIOTECH STARS

FRANK JIANG, Asia Pacific R&D head and global vice-president at Sanofi until 2015
Joined CStone Pharmaceuticals in 2016.

LI CHEN, R&D head at Roche China until 2010
Founded Hua Medicine in 2011.

JINGSONG WANG, head of R&D at Sanofi China until 2015
Founded Harbour Biomedicine in 2016.

JIM WU, director at Roche in China until 2013
Founded Ark Biosciences in 2014.

SAMANTHA DU, a scientist at Pfizer until 2001
Founded Hutchison Medipharma in 2002 and Zai Labs in 2014.

STEVE YANG, head of R&D Asia for Pfizer, then Asia and Emerging Markets R&D head at AstraZeneca until 2014
Joined WuXi AppTec as executive vice president in 2014.

LINGSHI TAN, head of Pfizer China R&D and vice president of global development operations
Founded dMed in 2016.

are, in turn, hiring at a rapid pace (see 'Three years').

Money is flowing into academic life-science research as well. "It is relatively easy to get a good grant for science," says Xiaodong Wang, director of the National Institute of Biological Sciences in Beijing and co-founder of the immuno-oncology biotech BeiGene in Beijing. "Because the scale compared to the United States is still relatively small, in terms of relative money, and national young talents can get start-up funds from the central government, it makes things easier." But Wang points out that research grants are usually submitted in Chinese, which can be a barrier for overseas scientists, who have to rely on translators. Wang himself returned to China from the United States in 2003.

Stevens says he has not found accessing funding in China easier than in the United States, but is heartened by the emphasis on high-risk research versus the low-risk research that he says largely gets funded by the US National Institutes of Health. He credits Chinese grant-makers with investing for the long term, taking pressure off the need to generate data quickly to secure another round of funding. In China, academics are also increasingly able to profit from their research — universities are permitting inventors to share the proceeds from patents and set-up their own companies. This is part of a wider initiative to get more discoveries from the bench to the bedside.

BIOTECH BONANZA

Competition for life-science talent in China has shifted. Despite their heavy investment in R&D centres in China in the past decade, multinational biopharma firms are finding themselves battling Chinese biotechnology start-ups to attract talent. Two top pharma recruiters in Shanghai — Jonathan Zhu, head of life sciences in China for Heidrick & Struggles (also a returnee), and Simon Lance, managing director for China at Hays — predict that job growth will increasingly ▶

2016, July

A Chinese biotech start-up breaks the country's record for first-round financing, raising $150 million.

2017

2017, June

China's drug administration body agrees to align Chinese drug regulations with the rest of the world.

Chinese CAR-T cell trial impresses on the global stage, showing excellent results for relapsed or refractory multiple myeloma.

ChinaBio reports that Chinese venture capital and private equity funds raised $45 billion over a period of 30 months for life-sciences investment.

Q&A: BIOTECH ENTREPRENEUR

Lan Huang founded BeyondSpring in 2010 and now splits her time between China and the United States.

BY SARAH O'MEARA

Why did you leave China?
I began my biology degree at Fudan University in Shanghai and transferred to the United States in my third year, in 1991. At that time, the government paid tuition fees and assigned you a job for five years after graduating. It was unlikely I would work in academia, and it was too long to be away from my research field, so I left.

Why did you move into biotechnology?
China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, and I saw that as an opportunity. I borrowed money to start my own consulting firms in the United States and China. In 2010, I founded BeyondSpring, which is developing a drug to treat lung cancer and the effects of chemotherapy. We have offices in Dalian in northern China and New York. China has lots of high-quality data, which is a huge boost to our research.

How has China changed since you left?
It's incredible. Every time I visit, something has changed. When I left, there were no elevators, no central heating. Certain foods were rationed. Now, living standards have improved hugely. In many respects, it feels no different to America.

What's the difference between doing business in China and the United States?
Technically, they are increasingly similar. You can expect the same software, hardware, research methods and standards. The major difference is expectation. China is a developing country, and everyone is very commercially driven and practically minded. They want to get to the end fast. In the United States, it's more science driven. They enjoy the journey. ■

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.