

# And Now I'm Back...

By Christina Chang, IMM.

張 玲 / 分醫所教授

*A somewhat exciting tale of adventure and intrigue, somewhat in the spirit of Indiana Jones.*

After 27 years in the United States, I'm back.

Of the things I have learned and experienced, what impressed me most? This is probably best answered by approaching it from professional, social, and scenic perspectives.

Let's begin with the last first, OK? Scenically, the Grand Canyon has few equals in the world. The scale is so big that even after seeing it, it is difficult to appreciate the qualities of the Canyon. Good thing I went backpacking and camping to truly experience what it is like. Yellowstone is another wonder. As were Yosemite, Lake Superior, Niagara Falls, the Rocky Mountains, San Diego Wild Animal Park, The Missouri Ozarks, Olympic National Park... The list could easily go on. Climate-wise there is nothing like southern California. Or the beauty of the changing colors of fall in the Midwest, or large snowflakes on a calm winter night.

*And so we decided to take a canoeing and camping trip. After a five hour drive we arrived at our destination. Our goal was to canoe down river, locate our campsite, and pitch our tents before sundown. We slid our canoe into the river, loaded our supplies, and shoved off. We paddled easily in the gentle flow of the river.*

Socially, activities with friends were many and enjoyable: canoeing rivers, bike trips, walks for cancer cure, and trips to football and baseball games. Having friends over to wrap jiao-tze (Yes, the dumpling!) in the early days. Meeting not only Americans but Koreans, Indians, Africans, Europeans, you name it. Getting made up for Halloween. Family get-togethers for Thanksgiving Day.

*Several miles downstream from our starting point, we rounded a bend in the river. Unexpectedly, we quickly approached a tree with its branches extending into the water. We were on a collision course! I was worried... I grabbed a branch! The canoe started to tip...! This was a large river, moving even faster...*

Professionally, I actually got to meet a lot of my Taiwan fellows, who impressed me with their dedication and hard work. It is these good qualities that may explain why many Ameri-



can laboratories prefer having students and postdoctoral researchers from East and Southeast Asian countries, including Taiwan. In fact, an increasing number of Asian professionals are reshaping the landscape of the biomedical community in the U.S., including universities and institutions, and in the private sector.

*So how does the U.S. attract so many foreign scientists from all over the world? My personal opinion is that U.S. can provide a near-optimal system (think of it like soil) for scientists (the seeds) to grow and compete both locally and globally.*

*I couldn't bring myself to let go of the branch. The canoe started to slip away beneath us, under the force of the river... What if our supplies fell in the river...*

What are the characteristics of this system? One is an efficient division of labor, at the highest level between research-oriented and teacher-oriented universities. In the latter, professors are not required to do much research but instead focus on the quality and content of their teaching. On the other hand, professors in research-oriented universities have a lighter teaching and/or clinical load, and hence have more time to do quality research. At some universities, the professors' teaching and research load are in between these two types.

*Oh no! The more the canoe slipped away, the tighter I held! Let go! Let go! I couldn't. The canoe was tipping...*

Another characteristic of the American system is that universities have strong academic support units. Support units may range from simple "computer repair and installation" to complicated "technology transfer and intellectual property services". It is noteworthy that another support unit concerns environment, safety

and health (ESH). This ESH unit routinely conducts training courses and lab surveys, and picks up biohazardous waste from each laboratory upon request. All of these types of support not only provide a variety of expertise and services but also significantly reduce duplications in effort and money spent.

I will mention as another important characteristic that the rules and regulations of American universities tend to facilitate learning, teaching, and researching, rather than being goals in themselves which inhibit productivity. When I was working on my doctoral degree, all graduate students and faculty had access to the departmental library 24 hours and 7 days a week. This was extremely convenient for students during a time when personal computers were not yet widespread. I truly enjoyed this honor system. Importantly, rules and regulations are updated to reduce inefficiency. For example, most official documents can now be provided via email without hard copies.

*Splash! Into the water we went. People, camping supplies, sleeping bags! The canoe was quickly floating away from us, down river.*

I would like to note too that to facilitate broader learning and encourage the sharing of knowledge, one of my previous universities in the U.S. maintains a special TV channel that broadcasts scientific seminars, music, and dance performances hosted by the university system. In the same vein of sharing knowledge, in general, university libraries can be accessed by the general public. People are welcome.

Oh, and so how did our canoe trip turn out? Friends recovered our canoe downstream (whew!), and we swam to the opposite river bank, grabbing things out of the water as we went. We dried out later around a campfire, and fortunately the water-proof coverings kept our sleeping bags dry. We slept well that night.



*Photo taken by author in Yosemite National Park*