Following normalization of U.S.-China relations in 1979, thousands of Chinese students wanted to come to the United States for advanced education and training. A major challenge, though, was that the U.S. universities had difficulty in comparing American and Chinese applicants and selecting the most qualified, since the GRE [Graduate Record Examination] and TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language] exams were not available for Chinese applicants.

To overcome this challenge, in 1981 Professor Ray Wu at Cornell University initiated the China-U.S. Biochemistry Examination and Application (CUSBEA) program with the goal of recommending qualified students in the areas of biological sciences to be educated in the U.S. The Chinese Ministry of Education, which sponsored the CUSBEA program in China, delegated coordination of the program to the biology department at Peking University. Professor Wu served as the U.S. coordinator, and he began to contact a number of major U.S. universities. Within only a year, approximately 50 universities had agreed to participate, a number that nearly doubled to almost 90 over the next seven years.

Until 1989, the last year of the program, 425 Chinese students came to the United States through the CUSBEA program. By 1984, due to its success, even those students who applied for admission on their own benefited from the reputation of the students admitted under the aegis of the CUSBEA program.

Even though the CUSBEA program ceased operations more than 15 years ago, the Chinese applicant pool has continued to increase. In the biological and biomedical sciences, many U.S. colleges were receiving far more applications each year than they could accommodate, creating a serious logistical burden in the handling, responding, and filing of applications. And, without the CUSBEA program, it was again difficult to evaluate the qualifications of the Chinese applicants.

Robert Yu, who was chair of the department of biochemistry at the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond from the late 1980s until 2000, first brought this issue to the attention of the Association of Medical and Graduate Departments of Biochemistry (AMGDB) at its 1994 annual meeting. Many of the AMGDB attendees that year believed it would be advantageous to establish a mechanism to assist U.S. institutions in evaluating the credentials of Chinese applicants. Based on our previous experience with the CUSBEA program, we believed that a face-to-face interview by an experienced interviewer was the most efficient and cost effec-
CUSBEA and CUSBA Programs

By Robert Yu, PhD, MedScD, and Ray Wu, PhD*

Meets West: CUSBEA and CUSBA Programs

States. Because of its relatively short history, the number of students who have completed the CUSBA program is not yet available.

Robert Yu and Ray Wu serve as the coordinators of the CUSBA program. The U.S. coordination office is currently located at the Institute of Molecular Medicine and Genetics, Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, GA, 30912 (tel. 706-721-0699, fax 706-721-8727, E-mail: ryu@mcg.edu).

The liaison office in Beijing is chaired by Dr. Zeng-Yi Chang (a former CUSBEA graduate), professor of biochemistry and molecular biology, at Peking University, and the liaison office is located at the Department of Life Sciences, College of Life Sciences, Rm. 204, New Life Sciences Building, Peking University, Beijing 100871, China; tel.: 86-10-6275-8822; fax: 86-10-6275-1526; email: changzy@pku.edu.cn.

We are fortunate that Professor Xiaocheng Gu, who participated in the founding of the CUSBEA program, continues to act as a consultant. Drs. David Allmann and Richard Haak (Indiana University School of Medicine, Indianapolis) served as group leaders of the team who conduct the onsite interviews. We usually invite 4–5 interviewers each year from participating universities. It should be noted that the CUSBA program is a non-profit consortium for the sole purpose of providing the coordination services in graduate admissions from China to U.S. and Canadian universities.

In conclusion, both the CUSBEA and the CUSBA programs have provided a vital service to U.S. educational institutions, achieving the recruitment and training of a large number of outstanding Chinese students in biological sciences, many of whom have become leaders in the biomedical and life sciences. Nine are Investigators of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), and many others have become professors and achieved recognition from prestigious academic institutions. A former CUSBEA student, Professor Xiaodong Wang of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, has become a member of the National Academy of Sciences.

Even though the majority of these scientists have remained in the United States, many of them have become increasingly active in helping China to develop life sciences. Those who have returned to China have made important contributions in science, engineering, education, and government service there, and, importantly, have taken an active role in the modernization of China. With the globalization of science, we will certainly witness more mixing and exchange ahead with China and other countries. 

*Contributed by Dr. Robert Yu, Institute of Molecular Medicine and Genetics and Institute of Neuroscience, Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, GA 30912, and Dr. Ray Wu, Department of Molecular Biology and Genetics, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, 14853