FACE of the MONTH Can Huang

Twinning has been high on the agenda for some time for UNU-MERIT. Our twinning with Renmin University China (RUC) is going from strength to strength so this month we feature UNU-MERIT researcher Can Huang who is responsible for contacts with our Chinese twinning partner.

* You are from China but left to do your PhD in Portugal- how come you chose Portugal, which is quiet unusual, and what was it like first going abroad to live and study?

I participated in an internship program Europe-Asia Business Internship Program funded by the European Commission in 1999 when I was a junior student in Renmin University. There are 50 Chinese students and 50 Japanese students sent to Europe to have 6-week internship. 100 European students were sent to China and Japan respectively. I was allocated to a Portuguese consulting company to do my internship and kept contact with the company afterwards. I was helping their business in China after I returned to China. That's why later in 2002 I started my Ph.D. study in Portugal as a continuation of the collaboration with the Portuguese company.

Adaptation to the foreign culture and life-style is always hard in the beginning. No exception for me. But I enjoyed my stay in Aveiro, a nice and quite town in Portugal. Similar environment as Maastricht.

* Even after seven years out of China, you are very involved in China centred research- were your intentions always to focus on China specific issues or has it just turned out that way when you started working at MERIT?

My Ph.D. thesis is about the Chinese innovation system and industrial dynamics. So I have never been cut off from the development and dynamics of China after I went abroad. I am continuing to work on it. As China has made a lot progress in innovation and development in recent years, there is more to be researched which means more opportunities for a scholar who works on the topic.

* You are very much involved with the twinning initiative between UNU-MERIT and RUC - what is it like being a researcher of innovation and nanotechnology that works on China, but lives and works in the Netherland? Do you feel Chinese in the Netherlands but a big foreign in China?

Because I am living abroad, my knowledge of the latest development in China will not be so updated, as the country is changing rapidly. That's a challenge. But with interaction with the colleagues in China, I try to learn from them and update myself in this regard. The advantage of doing research in Maastricht is that we have excellent access to literature database here, which is still not available everywhere in China. That's an
important advantage for academic research.

* You have taken care of visiting researchers from China at UNU-MERIT and of course interact a lot with researchers based in China - how do you compare yourself with researchers in China in general - do you think your attitude to research and your research approach differ from those that have never spent a fair amount of time abroad?

There would be some differences between research methodologies and interests between the groups in China and here. But I think that is an opportunity for collaboration and mutual learning. The research system in the Chinese universities is changing fast. It becomes more and more similar to the system prevalent in the advanced countries. The interaction between the Chinese scholars and their overseas partners definitely contribute to this trend.

* What are you most excited about as regards research in 2010? We have experienced only a few months in 2010. I am waiting for more excitements to occur.:)

* Finally, your thoughts on life in the Netherlands, and Maastricht? The life in Maastricht is rewarding and comfortable. But this winter is a bit tougher than usual, isn't it?