

## Wish you were there!

### Report on the 1st Bio-Pearl River Forum & 14th Annual Conference of CBA (Part I)

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In collaboration with the Department of Science and Technology of Guangdong Province and Guangdong Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, the Chinese Biopharmaceutical Association, USA (CBA) successfully held its 14th Annual Conference and Guangdong's 1st Bio-Pearl River Forum at Guangzhou Baiyun International Convention Center on June 18-20, 2009.

Supported by the Ministry of Science and Technology of the People's Republic of China, China Overseas Exchange Association, Guangdong Food and Drug Administration, Chinese-American Biopharmaceutical Society, Sino-American Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Professionals Association, and Chinese-American Biomedical Association, the conference was designed to create a platform for communication and collaboration among biopharmaceutical companies, contract research organizations (CROs), research institutions, government agencies, as well as individual research scientists, entrepreneurs, and venture capitalists. Despite the global economic crisis and the threat of swine flu, the conference drew over 800 attendees with nearly 200 attendees coming from the U.S., France, Australia, Sweden, and Korea.

#### **Preconference: Symposium of Biopharmaceutical Innovation**

The preconference entitled **Symposium of Biopharmaceutical Innovation** was a huge success. The conference room, which can comfortably accommodate 500 people, was packed; many people were standing in the back and the sides of the room. After the opening address and greeting remarks delivered by preconference organizer and co-chair Dr. Yingxian Xiao, and leaders from the central government and Guangdong provincial government, respectively, high-rank leaders from the 4 high-tech parks located in Guangzhou, Zhuhai, Zhongshan, and Shenzhen introduced their incentives and policies on recruiting talents, especially overseas talents. The lucrative benefits and generous supports made everyone in the room excited. Right after the introductions, 20 project leaders from the U.S. introduced their own projects, their interest of conducting their research and development in Guangdong, and their hope of getting support from the Guangdong provincial government and the high-tech parks. The 20 projects presented ranged from developing and marketing anticancer drugs to diagnostic



**Figure 1.** *The Conference Attracted Over 800 Attendees*



**Figure 2.** *Some of the CBA Member Attendees*



**Figure 3.** *The Preconference Was Well-Attended*



**Figure 4.** *Dr. Yifan Zhai Delivers Opening Remarks*

complicated structures and/or unprecedented properties can be easily achieved. In 2009, as of the presentation, about 60 new patents, the majority of which are therapeutics, diagnostics and materials for life sciences, involve molecules having core structures with the copper-catalyzed 1,3-dipolar cycloaddition, the signature triazole linkage of the best click reaction to date.

products. All of the projects had passed the prescreening conducted by CBA's expert committee before the conference. Due to time constraint, each project leader, however, was only given 5 minutes to tell his or her story. Leaders from the Department of Science and Technology of Guangdong Provincial Government, including Mr. Xinghua Li, director of the department, and Mr. Xiaoping Zhong, deputy director of the department, later met with the project leaders again and further discussed the plans of moving the collaborations forward.

### **Opening Ceremony and CBA Brilliant Achievement Awards Presentation**

The main conference started on the sunny morning of June 19, 2009. Mr. Qingliang Wan, vice governor of Guangdong provincial government, welcomed all conference attendees and briefly introduced Guangdong's plan on supporting high-techs, as well as policies on attracting talents. Dr. Yifan Zhai, president of the CBA (2009-2010) and the conference chairwoman, briefly reported the nearly one year of preparation for the conference, and she sincerely thanked every single one of the hundreds of people, especially those volunteers, for working together to put together the conference.

Following the opening remarks, Mr. Qingliang Wan presented CBA's 2009 Brilliant Achievement Awards to Dr. Robert Gallo, member of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, Dr. Nanshan Zhong, president of the Chinese Medical Association, and Dr. Luc Montagnier, 2008 Nobel Laureate in Physiology and Medicine, in recognition of their significant contributions to fighting viral infection and protecting worldwide human health.

### **Keynote Speeches**

In his presentation titled **"Using Click Chemistry to Find New Drugs and Diagnostics,"** Dr. K. Barry Sharpless introduced "click chemistry," Sharpless' new synthetic stratagem, to the over 800 conference attendees. According to Sharpless, click chemistry has been widely used in the chemical world. By using click chemistry, new molecule entities with complicated structures and/or unprecedented properties can be easily achieved. In 2009, as of the presentation, about 60 new patents, the majority of which are therapeutics, diagnostics and materials for life sciences, involve molecules having core structures with the copper-catalyzed 1,3-dipolar cycloaddition, the signature triazole linkage of the best click reaction to date.

Despite the advances in HIV research and AIDS treatment, there is currently still no cure for AIDS or vaccine against HIV. In his presentation, **“The Need for New Conceptual and Technological Approaches for Solving the HIV/AIDS Problem,”** Dr. Luc Montagnier pointed out that although the tritherapy can extensively reduce the viral multiplication and allow a partial restoration of the immune system, part of the viral reservoir remains. New techniques are, therefore, needed to completely eradicate the virus infection. Dr. Montagnier also stressed the role of oxidative stress in AIDS pathogenesis and how antioxidant treatment may reduce the variability potential of HIV. At the end of his keynote speech, Dr. Montagnier expressed his interest in working with China in HIV/AIDS research. He stressed that the findings in this area could also be used to fight other diseases.

Dr. Nanshan Zhong, who became famous during the 2003 SARS outbreak in China, demonstrated his passion for patients in his talk. He started his presentation, **“Requisite and Expectation about Biopharmaceuticals from a Clinician’s Point of View,”** with pointing out the differences between the approach that biopharmaceutical researchers generally follow (bench-to-bedside) and the one that clinicians tend to follow (bedside-to-bench). As a clinician, Zhong personally prefers gathering initial evidence from the bedside first, then conducting clinical studies, and finally using the information obtained from the clinical studies to better help patients. Zhong shared a successful bedside-to-bench story with the audience.<sup>1</sup> Zhong urged the biopharmaceutical professionals keep patients’ needs and clinicians’ expectations for simple and affordable drugs and clinical techniques in mind while conducting research.

Since he attended CBA’s 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference held in Shanghai in May, 2008, Mr. Sean Darragh’s enthusiasm in collaboration with the Chinese government and the Chinese biopharmaceutical industry has drastically increased. In his keynote speech, **“Keys to Fostering a Biotechnology Hub: An Exploration of What Works and What Doesn’t,”** Mr. Darragh, vice president of international affairs, biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO), shared his “secret recipe” for innovation, which includes essential ingredients such as free flow of information, solid public and private partnership, transparent and predictable government policies, strong financing support, perseverance, and strict IP protection. Despite the various challenges, Darragh believes that if “we all work together” we can solve global problems. He said that BIO is dedicated to working with the



**Figure 5.** The 2009 CBA Brilliant Achievement Awards Were Presented to Dr. Robert Gallo, Dr. Nanshan Zhong, and Dr. Luc Montagnier by Mr. Qingliang Wan



**Figure 6.** *Keynote Speaker, Dr. K. Barry Sharpless, Speaks with Mr. Richard Stone, Asian Editor of Science Magazine*

CBA and other organizations to create a successful China story.

In his keynote speech, **“HIV/AIDS Research: A Few Lessons from the Early Years and Some Perspectives on Targeting CCR5 (therapy) and Preventing env Interaction with CCR5 (vaccine),”** Dr. Robert C. Gallo first overviewed the history of discovering HIV and AIDS. He then discussed the current tests and therapies in this field. Despite the extraordinary advances made in the past decades, challenges and practical needs remain in the following areas: 1) drug deliveries to underdeveloped countries; 2) a “cure” for AIDS; 3) in the absence of cure, making current therapies more efficient; and 4) finding an effective vaccine. He shared further insights on the last two points. Gallo emphasized that the dependency of HIV on host cellular factor offers many opportunities of identifying new drug targets. Regardless of the challenges, Gallo

believed that we can develop a safe and efficient vaccine to prevent AIDS. But he stressed that the following are needed to achieve the goal: 1) higher availability of primates and easier accessibility of the primates to a broader number of scientists; 2) a sustainable immune response; 3) a broad immune response that can result in sterilizing immunity.

“Genetically engineered mouse models have impacted on all areas of cancer science on the basic and translational level,” Dr. Ronald A. Depinho, M.D., director at Belfer Institute for Applied Cancer Science, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, addressed in the last keynote address titled **“Mining and Modeling Cancer Genomes.”** Using the brain cancer model and the prostate cancer model, Depinho illustrated how scientists can use genetically engineered mouse models to understand the roles of genetic mutations in altering the developmental pathways, how to define the mechanisms of cancer progression, and finally how to use all the information gathered to guide the treatment for cancer patients.

**Post-conference Tours**

### Post-conference Tours

In addition to the 2-day (June 19-20, 2009) main conference on **Biopharmaceutical Innovation and Commercialization** and the half-day preconference meeting on New Drug Discovery and Development (June 18, 2009), CBA also organized post-conference tours (June 21-23, 2009) to the high-tech parks in Guangdong. The primary goal of the post-conference tours, which were free of charge to all conference attendees, was to foster collaborations among high-end overseas talents and local companies, research institutions, and high-tech parks.

Attendees of the post-conference tours were divided into 2 groups based on their interests. The first group, led by Dr. Yingxian Xiao, general secretary of the CBA's board of directors, visited Guangzhou, Dongguan, and Shenzhen, and the second group, led by Dr. Zhennan Lai, visited Guangzhou, Zhongshan, and Zhuhai. Besides meeting with the local government officials and visiting the facilities of the high-tech parks and companies, both groups conducted face-to-face meetings with the top management teams and scientists from the high-tech parks and companies. At those meetings, CBA members were invited to introduce their research projects and were given opportunities to ask questions regarding doing business in Guangdong. Early overseas returnees who are now working in those high-tech parks shared their experiences and wisdoms. They acknowledged the vast opportunities in Guangdong, as well as other parts of China, but also pointed out the challenges. Many of them considered persistence as one of the key elements of success.

The 2-day post-conference tours helped the CBA members not only better understand Guangdong's policies on recruiting overseas Chinese talents, but also reevaluate their chances of success should they decide to conduct their R&D, either on their own or in collaboration with local companies and research institutions, in Guangdong. At the end of the tours, both sides (Guangdong and CBA) agreed to continue working together after the tours to move the collaborations forward.

#### References:

1. Wang Zh-Y, Chen Zh. Acute promyelocytic leukemia: from highly fatal to highly curable. *Blood*. 2008;111:2505-2515.

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**Figure 7.** Post-conference Tours