

## A Conversation With... Tongchuan (TC) Li, Senior Scientist in Pharmacology

**Senior Scientist in Pharmacology**  
Tongchuan (TC) Li has been at Cubist since the "early days" on Emily Street in Cambridge. He proudly acclaims his employee number, 62, and notes that because of comings and goings there were 48 employees when he joined on March 1st, 1995.

In a recent conversation with the Cubist Connection, TC touched on his early academic achievements, how he came upon Cubist, and notable career highlights, among others things.



TC with Scott Rocklage at the 10th Anniversary of Cubist's NASDAQ listing. The T-shirt is from the celebration of that listing 10 years earlier.

### **Q: What led you to a career in pharmacology?**

TC: I developed a deep interest in medicine when I was very young. I grew up in the remote countryside of Fujian Province in China. Back then, there was a lack of experienced doctors and good medicine, so it was a major problem to be sick. I was motivated to learn medicine, so that one day I could serve the medical needs of many people.

I was trained as a medical doctor at Fujian Medical University, but throughout my training I was always more interested in research than in the clinical aspects. After graduating from the university in 1982, I applied for a position as an instructor there, and was granted a position in the department of pharmacology. Since then, pharmacology has become the focus of my career pursuits.

In 1985, I applied for graduate study at the University of Minnesota, and was fortunate enough to be accepted into the department of pharmacology. There, I studied under Professor Ben Zimmerman, a renowned professor in the field of cardiovascular pharmacology.

While at Minnesota, I conducted many animal studies involving dogs, rabbits, rats, and mice. My main area of interest was investigating the mechanism of action of anti-hypertensive agents by using animal models.

After receiving my PhD from the University of Minnesota in 1990, I then applied for a post-doctoral position at Boehringer Ingelheim, where I worked for almost three years.

### **Q: What attracted you to Cubist in the first place?**

TC: After leaving Boehringer Ingelheim, I started working at Cytomed in Cambridge. I

had been working there for a year when I received a call one evening from Scott Rocklage, who was the Cubist CEO at the time. Scott introduced me to Cubist Pharmaceuticals and told me that he was looking for a pharmacologist to initiate animal studies.

A week later I came in to see Scott and three other executives. I gave them a proposal on how to work with various animal models for testing the efficacy of antibacterial agents and determining their pharmacokinetic parameters and toxicity. Shortly after my visit, I received an offer letter, and became the first pharmacologist in the company. I was excited to be offered the opportunity to establish a new pharmacology lab.

**Q: At Cubist, what do you consider your greatest accomplishment?**

TC: I consider one of my greatest accomplishments at Cubist being part of a group effort, whose work resulted in the approvals of Cubicin. From 1996 to 1997, I worked closely with Frank Tally, and we started an active search for a compound to in-license. Frank then identified daptomycin as an in-licensing opportunity. A group of four of us went to Eli Lilly to complete the in-licensing process of daptomycin to Cubist in late 1997. Secondly, over the past 12 years I have developed a variety of animal models of infection for preclinical testing of daptomycin and many other antibiotic leads against bacterial infections/diseases.

**Q: Do you go visit China often?**

TC: Yes, because my mother as well as my brothers and sisters all live there, I try to visit once a year. In the summer of 2005, my whole family visited China, which was quite an enjoyable trip. I will actually be returning this December for another visit.

**Q: What do you do when you are not working?**

TC: I enjoy community service. I teach Sunday school at a Chinese Christian Church. Also, I am the past president of my medical university's alumni association in America, which has about 400 members. Currently, I am serving as a director of the association's education foundation. We raise money from alumni to provide scholarships for Fujian Medical University students who have extreme financial hardship. This year marks the university's 70th anniversary. When I attend the anniversary celebrations there in December, I will also be presenting these scholarships to the students.

During my down time, I also enjoy reading and spending time with my four children.

**What's on TC's reading list?** Classical Chinese literature, as well as famous essays in American History. Books include "My Life" by Bill Clinton, and "My Turn" by Nancy Reagan.

**Movie TC enjoyed:** I usually prefer watching Chinese movies, however, my favorite American movie is "Titanic," because of its touching story and great score.

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