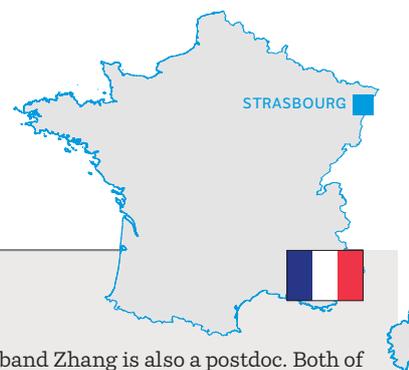


ALUMNI IN FRANCE



EDZARD KROL

FOREIGN COUNTRIES



PHOTO PRIVATE

Xiaoyan Zhang and Lili Hou

‘Het is niet alleen een grote eer voor Ben, maar ook voor ons’

‘I was actually watching the Nobel Prize for Chemistry announcement live when it was revealed that my supervisor was one of the winners’, says Xiaoyan Zhang enthusiastically. ‘I immediately called all of my colleagues over, and we watched the rest of the broadcast together. I was so happy!’

His wife Lili Hou was just as delighted: ‘It is not only a huge honour for Ben, but for all of us, everyone who has ever worked with him. I immediately told everyone I know that my supervisor had won the Nobel Prize this year. That feeling of excitement continued for weeks.’

‘It was particularly hard work in the first year after our twins were born’, says Hou, who gave birth to two boys in Strasbourg in July 2015. ‘Taking care of them takes such a lot of time. Luckily they are able to go to a crèche and their grandmothers take turns to visit from China to help.’ The Chinese scientist is currently working as a postdoc at the Institut de science et d’ingénierie supra-moléculaires of the University of Strasbourg, where

her husband Zhang is also a postdoc. Both of them gained a PhD in December 2013 with Ben Feringa as their supervisor.

The chemists met each other during their Master’s degree programme in the Chinese port of Tianjin. In 2009 Zhang was offered a PhD position in Feringa’s group, and his wife Hou was offered one a few months later. Zhang: ‘I really wanted to go there because the Chemistry Department in Groningen has a very good reputation.’ The pair moved into an apartment in the centre of Groningen. ‘It’s wonderful that so much of the history of this old city has been preserved,’ says Hou. ‘And that the standard of living is so high and people are so nice.’ They even used bikes to get around. ‘Really great fun’, says Zhang, ‘although we cycled much more slowly than the Dutch. I’ve also got great memories of playing football with my colleagues.’ After they each gained their PhD, they were both able to find a job in Professor Paolo Samori’s group. There they are each working on their own projects in nanochemistry and nanodevices. Feringa has said that he hopes his Nobel Prize will benefit the careers of his students. Is that a realistic expectation? ‘Absolutely!’, says Hou. ‘We will definitely benefit from Ben’s reputation. His name on our CVs shows that we have collaborated with one of the best scientists in the world and conducted world-class research.’



Twins Yungong en Yunneng