

## ***Perspectives from an AuthorAID mentor: Ambition. Inspiration. Satisfaction.***

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Five years. Looking back now, it seems like a lifetime since I took the life-changing decision to resign from my comfortable academic job at a well-respected university in the north of England to move to a newly established, international research institute in China. And why, you might wonder? Ambition – for sure. A sense of adventure – perhaps. The chance to make a difference in the lives of hard-working, extremely bright students – absolutely!

Five years. A period in which my life has been resembling a rollercoaster ride, most of it on an upward trajectory though. A period in which I rarely looked back at what ‘could have been’, back in Europe. There was little need to do so in the rapidly developing environment of a country brimming with drive and ambition, in everyday life as well as in academia.

Five years. Five years of ambition.

My students’ ambition, their keen interest to learn and acquire new skills, and the general upward trend in academic achievements in the country have been worth the challenges of picking up a research career under a rather different system and the uncertainties associated with a move to a completely new culture. A move to a country where I didn’t speak the language – and I still don’t to the extent I would want to. Five years ago, I secured a senior position at the Kavli Institute for Astronomy and Astrophysics at Peking University. I like to think that I made this opportunity work, because of my academic track record as well as my forward-looking, ambitious attitude to career advancement, combined with a genuine interest in far Eastern cultures.

This also proved to be the perfect time to reassess my professional goals. In the rapidly changing environment that represents China, I believe that I can play an important role by employing the skills I acquired during my previous appointments in the Western world to the benefit of my new scientific community. I see my main contributions through links to the international collective of scientists. I am pursuing these goals as Deputy Editor of *The Astrophysical Journal Letters*, the pre-eminent professional journal in my field, and as Director of the East Asian Office of Astronomy for Development, spearheading the International Astronomical Union’s decadal plan in support of worldwide development goals.

Five years ago, I first came across the *AuthorAID* community. Before our move halfway around the world, I already regularly assisted my Chinese scientific collaborators with their academic writing, while I also worked as freelance technical editor. I enjoy polishing and playing with language to make texts as tight and well-written as possible, which it turns helps me to become a better writer myself. I continue to do this, of course, for my small army of highly intelligent students here at Peking University. I hence enthusiastically embraced the *AuthorAID* initiative.

Five years later, *AuthorAID* has opened my eyes to fields well outside my area of expertise and allowed me to engage with a wonderful, supportive community of ambitious scientists and scholars around the world. Meanwhile, my background and involvement as *AuthorAID* mentor have allowed me to act as adviser to a newly established medical journal, work with bright young scientists in fields as diverse as

atmospheric physics and oceanography, and even host budding scientists from neighbouring countries for short periods of time. In turn, these visits enabled my junior colleagues to gain research experience at an internationally respected level, allowing them to take their new insights back to their home institutes, thus benefiting their local colleagues in turn.

Five years. Five years of inspiration. Inspired by the *AuthorAID* goals.

Mentoring through *AuthorAID* gave me the confidence to develop and lead workshops on aspects of academic writing, establishing international collaborations and editorial journal management. I am a seasoned public speaker and aim at conveying my enthusiasm for science through numerous professional and public speaking engagements. From humble beginnings as member of the lecturing team of journal editors running workshops for authors and reviewers at the International Astronomical Union's 2012 General Assembly in Beijing, I have become a popular workshop coach myself – and I am indeed most grateful to the *AuthorAID* team for helping me gain the insights and confidence to pursue this line of professional development.

The Korean Council of Science Editors, the American Astronomical Society, my commercial partner Cactus Communications and the National Astronomical Observatories of the Chinese Academy of Sciences are just some of the organisations that, mostly based on word-of-mouth promotion, have commissioned me to develop and run workshops. Many of these were to a large extent inspired by or based on *AuthorAID's* wonderful resource library. As an experienced university lecturer, I have long known that developing teaching materials is one of the best approaches to really gain a detailed understanding of one's subject. Five years of *AuthorAID* mentoring and workshop development have made me a much better teacher of topics that are often considered tangential to the academic endeavour but which are, in fact, really central to our profession: science communication and dissemination, also known as the publishing business.

As a senior academic in the highly visible role of journal editor, I realise that some of my junior colleagues look up to me as a role model. This places a significant responsibility on my shoulders. Indeed, I see it as the central tenet of my professional career to support my students and more junior colleagues, allowing them to succeed in their own right. There is little more satisfactory than seeing a student's eyes light up because they suddenly 'get it'; the moment when understanding dawns upon one's students is one of the most precious gifts a teacher can receive. This is one of the reasons why I enjoy my job so much. And indeed, at Peking University I have the great fortune of being able to work with the country's best and brightest students.

Five years. Five years of satisfaction.

There has indeed been little reason to lament having had to give up some of the pleasures associated with my previous appointment; my current role has allowed me expand my horizons much more than I had ever anticipated. I am indeed very lucky to be where I am today. The Chinese research environment has required me to cultivate a spirit of resourcefulness. With the assistance of my great team of students and junior colleagues, we have been able to carve out our own niche in astrophysics research, thus allowing us to grow into a highly productive and coherent team of internationally competitive scientists. We even had some unexpected yet potentially ground-breaking results, obtained by one of my students, published in *Nature* in December 2014!

Five years. Five years of satisfaction. And many more to come, no doubt.