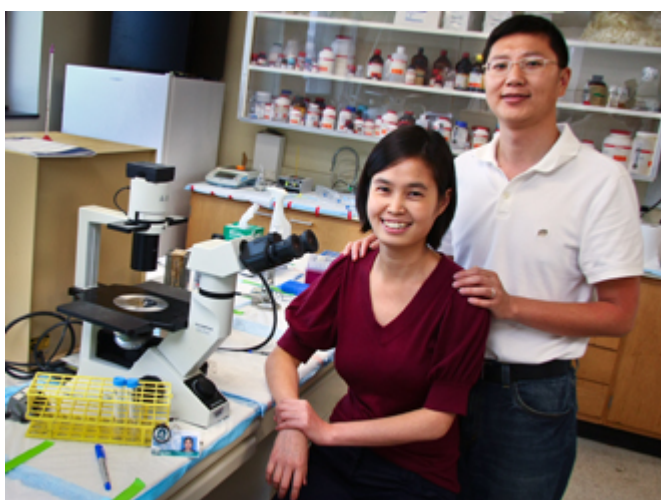


From Rural China to Tulane PhDs

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Jingjing Zhan and Xiujian Zhang journeyed from small rural family farms in China to Dalian University of Technology where they met and married, and then to the Tulane Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering. Both are earning doctoral degrees on Saturday (May 15).



Husband and wife Jingjing Zhan and Xiujian Zhang will receive their doctoral degrees on Saturday (May 15). (Photo by Guillermo Cabrera-Rojo)

Early on, neither of them had planned on leaving China, but on a whim, Zhang applied to Tulane. When she was accepted she thought, "Why not come here to see?" Zhan followed several months later after finishing his master's degree in chemistry.

The first year in New Orleans brought many challenges. They experienced a different culture, overcame language barriers, learned to drive, evacuated for Hurricane Katrina and adjusted to being new parents.

They enjoyed the small faculty-to-student ratio at Tulane, where they had

opportunities to develop relationships with their graduate advisers.

Zhang's research with assistant professor [W T. Godbey](#) involved developing a treatment for bladder cancer using gene therapy. Since completing her thesis, she works as a postdoctoral fellow in the laboratory of Bruce A. Bunnell, director of the Tulane [Center for Gene Therapy](#) on a new project looking at the ability of stem cells to treat diseases of the brain.

Zhan worked with professor [Vijay John](#), developing environmentally safe nanoparticles that travel through sediment and eventually attach to and break down contaminants in ground water. This work has led to a startup company to translate the technology into commercial applications. Zhan is now a research scientist focusing on drug and vaccine delivery in collaboration with the School of Medicine.

The couple's children, ages 6 months and 4 years, were born in New Orleans. Like all parents, Zhang and Zhan hope that their children will be healthy and happy. They also want them to master two languages.

Zhang and Zhan are optimistic about their future careers. They believe their experience at Tulane and in New Orleans has expanded their visions and opened them up to options they never imagined.

Belinda Lacoste is a student studying journalism in the School of Continuing Studies and a staff member who writes for the School of Science and Engineering.