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A bright example for all of us — Professor Shi Changxu

Wei Gao

Professor Shi Chanxu received the Top Scientists Award of China in early 2011. This is a very important event. As a materials scientist originally from China, I am very happy to hear this news. I see this award as a great encouragement, not only for people working in the field of Materials Science and Engineering, but also for all scientists and technologists in China.

Professor Shi is one of the most famous materials scientists in the world, and has also made great contributions to the strategic development of science and engineering in China. I had the opportunity to listen to him speak a long time ago in Beijing. The talk was about the development of super-alloys in China. Although it has been many years, I still remember I was deeply impressed and encouraged by his work on developing new alloys and alloy steels for turbine blades and other aerospace applications. I have also done some work on super-alloys, intermetallics and their high temperature oxidation since then, and often use Professor Shi's early work as references.

Introduced by Professor Zu Guang'an, I had an opportunity to meet Professor Shi in his office last year. I was late for the appointment due to an unexpected flight delay, but Professor Shi waited for me for more than two hours. He talked to me for more than an hour and a half, asking me about my recent research on metallic and electronic materials. I shared with him our recent work on ultra-ductile magnesium alloys and nano-dispersed composite coatings. He asked me in great detail about the alloys' compositions, and pointed out that poor ductility and corrosion resistance are two weaknesses of magnesium alloys that need to be improved to widen their industrial applications. I was again highly impressed by his very sharp comments, and was greatly encouraged by his advice.

I left China in 1985 and spent many years in the UK, US and now in New Zealand, leading a reasonably large research group. I have many research collaborations with friends in China, and have supervised many Chinese students in recent years. I was also awarded "Distinguished Chinese Materials Scientist" by the University of Science and Technology Beijing (sponsored by China Natural Science Foundation among others) in 2009. In my research group, I emphasise the importance of collaboration and group effort, and often use Professor Shi's words to encourage my team and myself: "Cooperation is a key factor for success. To promote team cooperation, one must treat others equally, and let everyone contribute his or her best." Professor Shi and his numerous achievements will always be my best example of the value of this approach, and I will continue to follow his lead, in order to make the best contribution I can to materials science in China, New Zealand and the whole world.

* Professor and Fellow of Royal Society NZ, The University of Auckland, New Zealand.