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December 26, 2005

Dr. Yves Brun  
Systems Biology/Microbiology Faculty Search  
Department of Biology  
Indiana University  
Jordan Hall 142, 1001 E 3rd St.  
Bloomington, IN 47405-7005

Dear Members of the Search Committee:

I am happy to provide a letter of recommendation for Dr. Huiying Li, who is applying for a faculty position at Indiana University. Huiying has been a graduate student with David Eisenberg across the hall, so I have had the opportunity to follow her development through numerous joint group meeting presentations, as well as through loose collaborations. Huiying is an impressive young scientist and I am happy to recommend her for a faculty position.

Huiying finished her PhD recently and has not done a truly separate postdoc, yet I believe there are reasons to project that she will be successful even at this stage. For one, she has come through an extremely rich intellectual environment in Eisenberg's laboratory and has taken full advantage of the diverse research opportunities there. Her projects have included biophysical work, crystal structure determination and bioinformatics. Besides acquiring a diverse skill set, she has demonstrated creativity and an ability to develop original ideas of her own. In her analysis of the TB genome (and others), she was able to take what had been a confusing situation – indiscriminate predicted functional linkages between paralogous proteins – and see that such situations could be clarified by interpreting them as parallel pathways. I had seen similar data and faced similar confusion but had not seen the angle Huiying did. She clearly has ideas of her own, and this will certainly serve her well when she heads her own research group.

Huiying also has the temperament to succeed in research. Despite being polite to a fault, she is persistent. She also seems to have the intangible qualities that lead to success, particularly the ability to identify fruitful strategies while avoid unnecessary obstacles.

While Huiying is certainly not fully seasoned at this point, I think her chances of long term success in research are high. I believe she presents a worthwhile risk and is certainly worth careful consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Todd Yeates". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Todd O. Yeates  
Professor in Biochemistry

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January 13, 2006

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Re: Dr. Huiying Li's application for a faculty position

Dear Dr. Brun:

I'm writing on behalf of Dr. Huiying Li, from the University of California, Los Angeles-U. S. Department of Energy Institute for Genomics and Proteomics, who is applying for a position in your Department/Institute. I have come to know Dr. Li quite well over the past few years as she and her supervisor, Dr. Eisenberg, have collaborated and worked closely with me on a research project of mutual interest. Dr. Li is a young woman of extraordinary talent and accomplishment, and I believe that a strong case can be made for her candidacy for any number of top academic positions.

In the first place, after 32 years of training and interacting with young Ph.D. and postdoctoral scientists, I have never met or heard of anyone who has the expertise that Dr. Li possesses in two highly specialized and important fields, structural biochemistry and bioinformatics. This unique set of qualifications has allowed her to perform research projects and conduct analyses that few individuals can match. Indeed, these endeavors have spanned the gamut of research thrusts that encompass both human health and disease as well as environmental and energy-related studies. Dr. Li's unique expertise has allowed her to probe deeply into the fundamental structure of molecules that perform important reactions in biological systems, thus gaining a perspective on how the function of these molecules might be manipulated and controlled. Most importantly, however, Dr. Li's expertise has allowed her to discern how these individual molecules interact with other ongoing reactions taking place within living organisms, both in time and in space, thus providing an appreciation of how the whole system or organism performs important biological processes. This "systems biology" approach, is currently recognized as the major means by which modern molecular science will help solve key problems in the health and environmental sciences that are so important to our nation, ranging in this case from issues related to tuberculosis and leprosy research to new forms of sustainable energy and the removal of carbon from the biosphere. Inasmuch as there are few people who are trained with the capabilities to perform these studies, it is clear from Dr. Li's record of achievement that she will present excellent credentials as she initiates her own program.

In all these studies, I have found Huiying to be fully capable of conducting herself as an independent investigator. Our collaborative interactions have illustrated this over and over, to the point that she has quickly been able to get to the heart of the problem and make good suggestions for future studies. I'm sure her other many collaborators and referees would also agree that she is fully capable of initiating an independent program, while being able to function in team projects as well. Furthermore, she has a very critical nature and clearly will be able to prioritize her time to maximize her productivity.

In summary, I have every confidence that Dr. Li will continue her stellar efforts as an independent investigator to use the unique tools she has mastered to probe research problems that are eminently fundable. On a personal level, Huiying is delightful and she communicates quite well, both orally and in writing. For example, I suggested her for an invited talk at a Gordon Conference a year or so ago and she gave a very lucid presentation that was very well received.

If I may be of further assistance or if you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to call or write. As I alluded to above, Huiying Li is one of the top young people I have encountered, on a par with the the top 5 or so of the over 70 Ph.D. students and postdocs I have previously trained. I seriously recommend that you interview her.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. Robert Tabita', written in a cursive style.

F. Robert Tabita  
Eminent Scholar and Professor  
Director, Plant-Microbe Genomics Facility  
Director, Plant Biotechnology & the Plant  
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