

Close to one year ago, in February 2023, Baitong Huang (27 years) landed at NTI as part of the environment group. Originally from China, he pursued educations in environment and sustainability in the Nordic countries and is now making efforts to learn Norwegian.

Across the globe

Baitong comes from a “small town” in the northeast of China close to Korea, with a size of about half a million people.

Pollution is a big thing in China, and it inspired Baitong to learn more about the environment. He started studying in the southern part of China, about two hours south of Wuhan. You have probably heard about the city because it got a little too much attention in 2019.

Baitong studied and completed a bachelor’s degree in Environmental Engineering there. The study he pursued during this time focused on chemistry, engineering and intensive lab-work, which did not hold Baitong’s full interests. Baitong dreamt of studying something more than just dealing with environmental pollutions.

– I wanted to follow the environmental lead and go into the direction of sustainability, which would be a lot easier to do in Europe. The Nordics are particularly known for being innovative and sustainable.

Not just for the studies

Baitong has two cousins who have studied abroad, however they eventually went back to China and started working there. Baitong on the other hand, after completing his education, wanted to continue studying and working abroad. He enjoyed meeting and working with people from different cultures.

He started studying for a master’s degree in Science for Sustainable Development at Linköping University in Sweden, his first time travelling abroad.

“Be part of the solution for a sustainable future!” is the study programme’s tagline. Here, Baitong got to understand environmental and climate change problems on a global level, as well as other sustainability challenges. In one of the courses, he got to know about carbon footprint and lifecycle assessment.

– Life cycle assessment (LCA) caught my attention right away and I wanted to dive deeper into working with LCA.

Norway-bound

This then led him to pursue a second master’s degree, this time in Industrial Ecology, which was only offered by a few universities in Europe. One of these was NTNU in Trondheim in Norway, where the program focused heavily on data analysis and modelling. Here, Baitong found he had started something he really liked. He also found Norway to be a fascinating place to live and work.

– This made me sure that I would love to stay here, as well as confirmed my willingness to work with LCA and Environmental Product Declarations (EPD).

Personality growth

Baitong says he could easily get bored or tired unless he was able to find a strong interest in what he was doing, and that he really enjoys his current work with LCA.

– I keep getting energy from my job, I do not even need coffee.

Before coming to Europe, Baitong used to be quite introverted and was passive in talking to people and making friends. But this has changed a lot since his study and work life abroad.

– It is a great feeling to try new things and to meet new people. I now enjoy being more outgoing. I sometimes feel like I have different personalities when speaking different languages. I still remember that I was nervous before I went abroad, would I like it? It has definitely been a successful decision and a great adventure.

Introduction to work life

Having been a fulltime student consequently, Baitong started to search for jobs as an LCA professional. This led him to NTI, where he now works as an advisor in the environmental group, as part of NTI's R&D and Consulting department.

– I used to admire my friends who are working with LCA and EPDs, and now I am doing it too!

Baitong left China in 2018 and was back for a short visit in late 2019, right before the pandemic hit. During the pandemic, his town had very strict rules and had been in quarantine several times, and as a result, Baitong had not been home since 2020 until his first Christmas holiday in 2023, after he started working at NTI.

–A very long time had passed, I even felt nervous when I was travelling home. But when I finally met my family, the stress was all gone immediately. Everything still felt familiar, it almost felt like I had not been away for too long. I had a great time despite suffering from the jet lag.

Professional tasks

At NTI, Baitong has mostly been working on EPD-projects, and in the beginning he contributed a lot to ongoing projects. As time passed, he was able to join new projects from scratch and get the full experience, and has been involved in several large projects. He has now become more active in research projects too.

– I would like to continue in the direction of LCA and EPD to improve my expertise and research about new challenges. The EPD verifiers are very professional people, perhaps that is something to work towards in the future.

Baitong enjoys being able to practice what he has learned in school and working with exactly what he finds the most interesting. As a side note, he admits to liking the paycheck after years as a student as well.

– Making money from actual tasks you do instead of working on examples in school is a big motivator for me. Having very helpful colleagues has made my start of working life very good and smooth.

Wooden future

Baitong is optimistic about the future of wood use. It is not nearly as popular to build with wood in China compared to the way wood is used for example in Scandinavia, but he firmly believes using natural resources is the way to go.

– I even have the sign meaning Conifer as part of my Chinese name (Bai 柏), so this almost feels like a destiny, Baitong laughs.