

Huya widens net, links up with CZCBD for drug candidates

By Shannon Ellis, Staff Writer

SHANGHAI – Privately held Huya Bioscience International, of San Diego, has signed a strategic partnership with the Changzhou Center for Biotech Development (CZCBD) for the advancement of innovative drug and biomarker candidates. Huya, considered an early adopter with respect to Chinese innovation, has been combing China's biotech parks and universities, peeking into labs, to seek out drug candidates with global potential.

The deal with CZCBD puts Huya at more than 100 such agreements with Chinese universities and hi-tech parks, and the count keeps growing.

Across China, "Huya has a number of first look agreements and partnerships in place," Clem Gingras, Huya's chief technology officer and chief operating officer for Asia, told *Bioworld Today*.

"When reviewing potential partner targets, Changzhou attracted our attention not only as one of the most developed cities in Jiangsu province, but also due to the significant amounts invested by local government in the biotech industry, especially in innovative projects."

Chief Executive Mireille Gillings founded Huya more than seven years ago, based on her experiences here as a consultant, where she found the quality of science surprising and impressive. The company now has eight offices across China, with headquarters in San Diego and in Shanghai's Zhangjiang Hi-tech Park.

Huya's business model sets it apart from most other companies working in China. It has cast its net very wide, playing a numbers game to look for a continuous source of compounds, rather than pursuing a single compound strategy. To date, the firm has some 1,300 compounds under evaluation covering all therapeutic areas.

The company claims to have 80 scouts, more than all the top five global pharmas combined, networking with top investigators and thought leaders, giving Huya early access to programs as they emerge.

Huya has signed strategic agreements with many of the government-backed hi-tech industrial parks, including Zhangjiang Biotech Pharmaceutical Base, Liaoning (Benxi) Bio-Pharmaceutical Industry Base, Wuhan National Bio-industry Base, also known as Biolake, and Taizhou National Medical Hi-tech Development Zone, also known as "China Medical City."

Partnerships with researchers and universities account for half of

Huya's agreements, which include Tianjin Research Center of Basic Medical Sciences, Fudan University's School of Pharmacy, Tianjin Institute of Pharmaceutical Research, Shenzhen Polytechnic School of Applied Chemistry and Biotechnology, Tianjin International Joint Academy of Biotechnology and Medicine, Zhejiang Chinese Medical University Life Science College, School of Pharmaceutical Sciences at Sun Yat-sen University, School of Medicine and Pharmacy at the Ocean University of China, Beijing Institute of Materia Medica, Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences and Peking Union Medical College and Shanghai Institute of Materia Medica.

BRIDGE TO GLOBAL MARKETS

Chinese researchers are not known to so easily share their findings with strangers, and Huya has invested the time to build relationships; but in order to do so, the company has had to have something to offer in return.

Having such a large number of offices in the country, in key cities such as Shenzhen and Beijing, has helped to show its commitment and allowed it to avoid the pitfalls of trying to work with China remotely.

But just as importantly, and in evidence with the recent agreement with CZCBD, Huya offers to act as a bridge to global markets, with a team of drug development and commercialization experts on hand to provide advice and consultation on how to get there.

The Changzhou Biotech Center has 800 biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies under its umbrella. Those companies that decide to leverage Huya's services will give Huya the right of priority review to evaluate research and development projects. Typically, local companies will retain China rights but license ex-China rights to Huya.

The bridge from China to the west is anchored on the other side with ties to multinational drug companies. Huya signed agreements with Abbott in 2009, and the year prior with N.V. Organon, a subsidiary of Schering-Plough Corp. (later acquired by Merck & Co. Inc.), opening its portfolio of Chinese molecules to accelerate development. Organon is an equity investor in Huya.

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Another deal in 2008 with Solvay Pharmaceuticals focused on cardiovascular candidates.

"China has an extremely rich pool of drug candidates, which we are able to tap through our extensive network of partners," Gillings said, at the time of the Abbott deal. "We've been effective in leveraging those relationships to the mutual benefit of our partners in the west and in China."

Huya has two drug candidates in its pipeline, for cardiac fibrillation and oncology that have shown results in early China trials and gone through development in the U.S.

HBI-3000 is a multi-ion channel blocker for the treatment of arrhythmia for patients with atrial fibrillation. In preclinical

models, the compound showed a unique ion channel profile with no pro-arrhythmic risk, the company said.

HUYA in-licensed HBI-8000 from Chipscreen Biosciences, of Shenzhen. Chipscreen has filed an NDA for T-cell lymphomas in China and is recruiting a non-small cell lung cancer phase 2. A benzamide class small-molecule inhibitor of HDAC (histone deacetylase), it is an oral, low nanomolar inhibitor of cancer-associated HDACs 1, 2, 3 and 10.

The U.S. phase 1, done in partnership with the CRO Quintiles, showed strong results replicating data from trials held in China. Huya is seeking to monetize both candidates through out-licensing. //