This is President Rosenberg’s sixth annual blog chronicling the TUC-FIU partnership, the annual China Commencement and our students in the China program. This is his third blog post of this trip. Click on the appropriate link to read his first and second blog posts.

The air was heavy with humidity as we left the squeaky-clean airport in Haikou, Hainan Province. Hainan is a novelty — it is tropical and resembles South Florida. Indeed, like Miami at the southernmost tip of Florida, Hainan is at the southern tip of China. We clearly had left the chilly overcast weather of northeast China for China’s equivalent of the tropics.

There is life out there! China is a very big country. Despite our northeast-centric understanding of the country, the scale and scope of the country’s geography and people are notable. Our visit to Hainan Province is another reminder of China’s diversity. The island, home to 8 million people, is one of the country’s few tropical tourist destinations. Its capital is Haikou, a seaside city on the northeast edge of the island.

Known as the “coconut city,” Haikou lives up to its reputation with unending coconut-lined streets bathed in the humidity that we know and worship in Miami. Haikou and Miami have much in common aside from coconuts and weather. Both cities have about 2 million residents. They are tourism and commercial centers for their respective regions. Both are periodic victims of hurricane-force winds and water events. And both have fragile ecosystems that are threatened by growing residential and commercial development.

I have had an eye on Haikou for nearly four years. Its large public university is Hainan University (HU), one of the country’s top 100 institutions of higher education. At least two of its programs — hospitality and tropical botany — align with FIU program strengths. And the institution’s values are similar in nature, with a student-centric approach and a desire to serve community through win-win solutions that are
admirable. Indeed, an academic conference on tropical botany co-sponsored by HU and FIU allowed me to meet with Dr. Jennifer Richards, our home-grown Dr. Hong Liu (herself a native of Hainan), and recently arrived Dr. Chris Baraloto, the founding director of our new International Center for Tropical Botany.

I never get enough time to spend with faculty colleagues, so I appreciated the opportunity to interact with these three FIU faculty. And I never cease to be amazed at the quality of the professorial talent at FIU. My three colleagues are no exception, and watching them in action with the hundred or so other delegates at this international conference gave me confidence that our “World’s Ahead” tagline aptly describes these three specialists.

Our FIU colleagues delivered the following papers: “Collaborative Research in Tropical Botany to Mitigate Global Change,” (Baraloto); “Conservative Translocations of Chinese Threatened Plant,” (Liu); and “Using Remote Sensing to Monitor Wetland and Restoration: Lessons from the Florida Everglades,” (Richards).

Our botanists were the only ones at the conference from the United States. They were joined by researchers from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Kadoorie Farm & Botanic Garden (Hong Kong), the Botanic Institute of Barcelona (Spain), the Center for Biodiversity Management in Yungaburra, Queensland (Australia), and, of course, Hainan University. Some of the top biodiversity scientists in the world were in attendance. And next year, we will return the favor by co-hosting this same group and so many others in a follow-up scholarly conference at FIU!

Wrapped around this conference were two days of consultations with HU officials, led by FIU’s Associate Provost Dr. Lu Peng, along with FIU Chaplin School of Hospitality & Tourism Management Dean Mike Hampton, his deputy Shu Fang, and Doctors Baroloto and Liu. HU President Li Jianbao led the discussions for our hosts along with their deans from hospitality, botany and other units of the institution.

President Li emphasized throughout our deliberations the importance of human-scale results through the proposed cooperative relationship and approved of my use of the “win-win” metaphor to characterize our mutual search for utility. We expect to complete discussions and an outline of collaboration in the next 30 days following consultations with participating academic units at both institutions.

The agreeable and successful visit to Hainan was considerably enhanced by a very special personal tour by former FIU student and faculty member Zhen (Jamie) Chen. This affable young man is now completing his Ph.D. while teaching in Sanya, Hainan. We hope to see him and his new bride back at FIU someday soon!

As we turn northward again, to the Chinese northeast, know that there is life out there in southernmost China and that our FIU community will soon be the beneficiary of this southern radiance.

Now off to Qingdao!