

“2013: A Wuhan Odyssey”  
~Report of my Wuhan University life~

March 1<sup>st</sup> – April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013



At the main gate of campus, April 4<sup>th</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

I am Shohei ANDOH, a 5<sup>th</sup>- year student of Fukushima Medical University, school of medicine. I studied at Wuhan University, located Wuhan, Hubei, China, from March 1<sup>st</sup> to April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

Wuhan city is 600 km west of Shanghai. There is Yellow Crane Tower (黄鹤楼), famous for Chinese poems written by Li Bai (李白). Wuhan city is also near Red Cliffs (赤壁), a battle location from the Three Kingdoms period (三国时代). There is 100 km distance from Wuhan to Red Cliffs, but that is “nearby” in China.



From the bottom of Yellow Crane Tower, March 9<sup>th</sup>

Wuhan University was established in 1893. It is one of the earliest national universities of modern China. The School of Medicine came into existence after merging with Hubei Medical University. Therefore the medical school campus is a little bit far from the main campus. It takes about 30 minutes on foot. The exchanges between FMU started in 1996, when the medical school was still Hubei Medical University.

By the way, some Chinese people have an “English name.” They use that name especially for Westerners, because sometimes Chinese pronunciation is difficult for them. Using an easy name helps with smooth communication.

In Wuhan, I followed this custom, and had taken “Andy.” Now I look back upon my Wuhan life as “Andy,” and I would like to write what I felt there.

## 2. University life

During my stay, exchange students belonged to different laboratories, and took “基礎上級” course (= basic research advanced course) in Wuhan University, as also carried out at FMU.

I belonged to the laboratory of Professor Zhang Baifang (張百芳 先生), 生物化学与分子生物学系, 基礎医学院. She mainly researches diabetic nephropathy and signal transduction, and she spoke English fluently. She was also in charge of foreign students' class I will describe later. There were two women in my lab. They did not speak English so well, but they gave me good treatment. I spent my daily life without any inconvenience.



With Prof. Zhang, April 3<sup>rd</sup>



Fellows of my lab, March 6<sup>th</sup>

In my daily life, I spent weekdays in the lab from 9:00 AM to 10:00 PM. Saturday and Sunday were holidays.

I was given a desk and I could use my laptop computer. In my lab, cell culture and Western blot proceeded almost every day. I observed or helped with these experiments. Fortunately I had learned such techniques in Japan, so I could understand what they did without so much explanation in English. I felt these techniques are almost the same in Japan, but I was a little bit surprised that water used in experiments was drawn from glass tanks.



My desk, at my lab, March 13<sup>th</sup>



At my lab, March 13<sup>th</sup>

Journal club was held about every other week. We discussed papers in English about an hour, especially those about cell or animal models of diabetic nephropathy. They spoke in Chinese when discussion was heated, but Prof. Zhang kindly translated and summarized in English. Thanks to her, I could keep up with discussion.

I attended biochemistry class (in English) for foreign students twice a week. Using the famous textbook “Harper’s Illustrated Biochemistry,” we covered about 1 chapter every 2 hours. During my stay, the main topic was “glycolysis” and subsequent pathways. When I was a 2nd-year student, I studied this field in English by chance, so luckily I could keep up with class. My impression from looking at an attendance list was that, foreign students mainly came from India, but there were some Canadians, Singaporeans, Koreans, and so on. Foreign students were quite friendly, they spoke to me before/after (even during!) lecture. During lecture, some students listened most attentively and participated actively. Others made noise by talking, playing games on a smartphone or tablet, or studied other subjects, just as happens in Japan...



At lecture, March 8<sup>th</sup>



Checking their attendance, March 8<sup>th</sup>

I mentioned above my routine in Wuhan. Moreover, I visited two university hospitals, and an exchange meeting was held with Wuhan University students.

Dr. Wang, his wife, and Dr. Mei (I will mention them later) helped us to visit university hospitals. We visited Zhongnan hospital (中南医院, mainly its neurology ward, where Dr. Mei worked), and Renmin hospital (人民医院, mainly its psychiatric ward, where Dr. Wang's wife worked). There are over 2,000 beds in Zhongnan hospital, and 3,000 beds in Renmin hospital. Each hospital consisted of several buildings. I was impressed with the scale of each.

Dr. Mei worked at Zhongnan hospital near the medical campus. That hospital was built in 2009, so it felt clean. The neurology ward had 120 beds and 12 beds in the stroke unit.



Stroke unit, March 20<sup>th</sup>



Ornament in the hospital, March 20<sup>th</sup>

Dr. Wang's wife worked at Renmin hospital away from the medical campus (near Yellow Crane Tower). We visited the female psychiatric ward where she worked, but she looked like highly busy. After that we looked around the hospital, which also felt clean.



Overview of the hospital, March 20<sup>th</sup>



Inside of the Renmin hospital, March 20<sup>th</sup>

In the exchange meeting, we presented about Fukushima, FMU, the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, and medical education in Japan. I talked about the last one. Through the discussion, I knew that in China passing the national exam and finding a job just after graduation are harder tasks than in Japan, and that doctorate degree was necessary to get a good job. They were surprised that it takes 6 years to graduate medical school and get Bachelor Degree, because it takes 5 years in China. We understood the different situations among Japanese and Chinese medical students.

Wuhan University students delivered us the presentation to introduce Wuhan. They spoke English fluently. We learned about new foods we had not eaten, and places we had not been to. Unfortunately, we had little time before leaving Wuhan, so we could not do almost all of these.



With mentors, April 1<sup>st</sup>



With students, April 1<sup>st</sup>

In the free talk session, many students attended. I knew Japanese “Anime” and “Manga” were highly popular in China. Some students were interested in these things, so they started to study Japanese. I made some friends here, so I wished this meeting would have been held earlier.

I think this meeting was meaningful, for there are complicated problems between Japanese government and Chinese one, but I didn’t feel any discord when I talked with Chinese students. I realized problems between countries were completely different from problems between people. I strongly felt the importance of communication. I will discuss this later.

### 3. Daily life

I stayed at “双湖园迎宾楼” inside the campus. My Chinese friends said this was a special accommodation for “respectable guests,” and students had little opportunity to enter it. They looked surprised that we stayed there.

There was a wooden flooring in our room. There were twin beds, refrigerator, air conditioner, television, electric kettle, and so on. There was a pair of sandals in each room, so we could feel relaxed inside. During our stay, the temperature was dynamically; one day the highest temperature was almost 30 ° C, another day the lowest temperature was almost 0 ° C. Thus it was highly comfortable that we could use air conditioner freely. It was also useful to dry our washings up.

In addition, there were a closet, washstand, toilet, and shower. The washstand has no trap in plumbing, and the pipe was extended downward straight. The toilet was western style, but we had to dump the toilet-paper without flushing it. We could take a shower whenever we wanted to.

There was a shared washing machine for common use. Sometimes we had to wait for others to finish their laundry. We had no idea where we should dry our clothes, so we had to dry them inside our room. We were occasionally in trouble because it took time to dry up them.

The accommodations had Wi-Fi. We could use the Internet, but the connection situation was various by the place in the room.



The entrance of 双湖园迎宾楼, March 7<sup>th</sup>



My room, lighter than actuality, March 1<sup>st</sup>

On campus, there were many stores, and we could buy snacks, drinks including beer, daily necessities, and so on. Store clerks could not speak English, so we had to communicate in Chinese. At first, we had difficulty even to listen to price. Incidentally, small bills (even 1 Yuan) are used in China, so I sometimes felt they handled it sloppily.

It was useful that there were students' restaurants on both sides of our accommodations. In “学生一食堂,” we paid with “meal card.” We charged money in the card beforehand. We did not have card because we were just temporary students, so our mentors lent it for us. Rice was 0.2 Yuan per 100 g (supplied 200 g or 300 g) as staple food, and other dishes were 1 to 5 Yuan. We could order by pointing at them, so we were relieved though we did not speak Chinese. Each time the price of a meal was 10 Yuan or less in almost all cases. In “来华餐厅,” we paid in cash. An order of meal and delivery was conveyed verbally. So even if we could have ordered our meal in writing, we could not recognize the name of meal. Sometimes we did not notice when our meal was ready.



Overview of 学生一食堂, March 7<sup>th</sup>



Overview of 来华餐厅, March 7<sup>th</sup>



Lunch at 学生一食堂, March 13<sup>th</sup>



Dinner at 来华餐厅, March 3<sup>rd</sup>

About traffic in the town. Although it was right-hand traffic in China, my friend said “a car could turn right when the signal was red.” Sometimes I was almost run over before I got used to this custom. In many case, the driveway had two or more lines, so when there was no signal near the crossing, we had to cross half way, wait on the center, and then cross the other half. Although we could seldom see hybrid car or electric car, we could see many electric motorbikes that we could seldom see in Japan. Some of them had a burglar alarm, which made a big noise even in the midnight.



Electric motorbike charging, March 6<sup>th</sup>

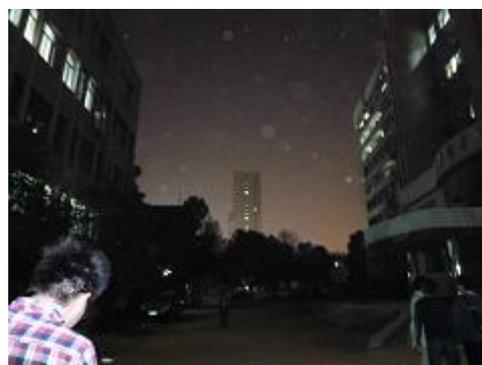


Electric motorbike charging, March 9<sup>th</sup>

The air pollution was highly severe as reported in Japan before (during, and after) our stay. As below pictures shows, we could see blurred scene in the distance, and it was dim even in the night perhaps by diffused reflection. Wuhan city is still developing, so there were many buildings under construction. It was a cause of air pollution. People wearing masks were only those on motorbike; we could seldom see others wearing masks downtown. When we wore a mask, our friends were anxious and said, “Did you catch a cold?” So I could use only few masks brought from Japan.



Blurred scene, March 20<sup>th</sup>



Dim night sky, March 8<sup>th</sup>

#### 4. My friends

Dr. Wang (王得志 先生) and Dr. Mei (梅斌 先生), who had been to Fukushima last year, helped us officially and privately through our stay. They held private welcome and farewell parties, let us visit university hospitals, arranged the trip for Wudang Mountains (武当山), and so on. Moreover, Dr. Wang bought SIM cards for us, took us downtown to buy daily necessities, and so on. They looked after us affectionately. We sometimes felt anxious during our stay, but we were always thankful for their consideration.



Dr. Wang (left) and Dr. Mei (right), at private welcome party, March 4<sup>th</sup>



At private welcome party, March 4<sup>th</sup>



At private farewell party, April 3<sup>rd</sup>

In addition, we could meet many mentors who had been closely connected with FMU or Japan, such as Dr. Liu (刘昱 先生, woman in above pictures). They supported our stay sometimes in Japanese, and reassured us.

There was no way we could measure all that we got out of our stay with many friends. We talked with each other, played sports such as badminton, and visited the main campus, Yellow Crane Tower, Chang Jiang river (長江), Hanami (花見), museum, theater, Wudang mountains (武当山), Hankou (漢口), zoo, and so on. We enjoyed great times throughout our stay.



At Shiyan city (十堰市), March 22<sup>nd</sup>



At Wudang mountains, March 23<sup>rd</sup>



After Hanami, at main campus, March 14<sup>th</sup>



After badminton, at gymnasium, April 4<sup>th</sup>



At Wuhan zoo, March 29<sup>th</sup>



At students' dormitory, April 4<sup>th</sup>

## 5. My feeling on Wuhan

I would like to summarize what I felt through my stay in Wuhan.

In places where people gathered for example, food courts in the downtown or parks, we often encountered – it may be not favorable expression – beggars. I was surprised more than anything else when we were eating in the food court, a beggar suddenly ate noodles from our table, and even worse, he asked for money. Another day, we were asked for money 3 times during 1 meal. The same happened on the subway we used in Shanghai, and physically challenged people asked passengers for money. I am sorry that an outsider like me discusses this, but I clearly feel the social security system is not sufficient in China. Although China's economy is developing increasingly, there are some social problems like that and environmental problems, such as air pollution.

What I felt in daily life was that English was only a tool to communicate. Although people emphasize the importance of English, if there is nothing to tell or to think, it is as same as not to be able to speak. It is important for us to have things to say, so we should consider things well. I offer a few example of my regret. When we were interviewed by a TV newscaster in Hanami, she said “Why do Japanese view sakura?” We did not answer and felt awkward. I would not like to avoid political topics, once the talk started, Chinese students had overwhelming knowledge, and they could discuss it in English. Some Chinese students were more familiar with Japanese culture than Japanese. I was ashamed that Japanese may not know Japan well enough.

The thinking about student life also differed greatly between Japanese and Chinese. One of my friends said the class had started at 7 a.m. and ended at 10 p.m. when he had been a high school student. There were only 2 holidays a month, and of course there was no club activity. Another friend who majored in Japanese said “there are many Chinese who could speak Japanese, so I study business management in Japanese.” My multilingual friend, who could also speak Japanese, dreamed of getting a job in a Japanese pharmaceutical company. I felt strong hunger for everything in Chinese students. Now Japanese students have less hunger, so Japan may lose competitiveness in the future if we content ourselves with “the cards we were dealt.” I would like to note again that we should make good use of our school days and the spare time we have. We should know Japan and the world more. I think spending our daily life mindful of the future is essential for us to compete in the world from now on.

## 6. Conclusion

My experience in Wuhan over 1 month was substantial beyond what I can describe. Throughout my stay, I strongly felt the importance of communication. Misunderstanding happens among people. Although it happens among Japanese, what about misunderstanding among foreigners? When a Chinese friend asked us about an absurd misunderstanding concerning Japan (I hesitate to write it here), we laughed at its ridiculousness. On the other hand, I imagined that I really had no misunderstanding about China. It is indispensable for building up friendship to resolve and dispel misunderstandings through dialogue.

Finding myself overseas, I could look at Japan more objectively. I recognized points of concern and appreciated good points of Japan. Moreover, when I was abroad, a stronger sense of my own Japanese identity emerged. Now I think I would like to know more things about Japan, and introduce them to international friends and colleagues.

In conclusion, I thank President Kikuchi, Professor Fukushima, Student Affairs, Planning and Financial Affairs, and many others at FMU who quietly attend to the needs of our university and student body. I also thank Dr. Wang (王先生), Dr. Mei (梅先生), Professor Zhang (張先生), Ms. "Daisy," and others at Wuhan University who made this experience so meaningful.

Professor Nollet at FMU provided some editorial advice for the English version of this report. Thank you.

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