

6. Appendix

6.1 Technical details of the research stay

I was working in the group of Prof. Dong Shaojun at the Changchun Institute of Applied Chemistry, Changchun, Jilin province, P.R. of China, from November 2 until December 11, i.e. 6 weeks. Her address at the institute is Prof. Dong Shaojun, Changchun Institute of Applied Chemistry, Chinese Academy of Sciences, No. 159 Renmin Street, Changchun 130022, P.R. of China.

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My exact travel itinerary to/from and within China is given in Tab.1

place	arrival date	departure date	additional information
Zurich		29.10.1998	
Changchun	30.10.1998	12.10.1998	research stay
Beijing	12.10.1998	16.12.1998	tourist
Xi'an	16.12.1998	19.12.1998	tourist
Shanghai	19.12.1998	22.12.1998	tourist
Zurich	22.12.1998		

Tab 1. Travel details

6.2 Personal experiences

The Changchun Institute of Applied Chemistry is said to be the best of its kind in China - and not only by the people at the Institute themselves. The "Institute" is actually a semi-autonomous city within Changchun with housing for its 2000 employees, an own heating system, shops, schools and even a clinic. Living at the Institute's student dorms was the best thing that could have happened to me; hotel would have been the costly, very moderately luxurious isolation cell. It's unusual to go fetch warm water for your bathtub to warm you up at the sixth day after the heating broke down with outside temperatures between -10° and -20°C. But you get used to it.

Actual working conditions at the "Institute" - which should rather be termed a graduate school with corresponding electroanalytical, physical and organic chemistry faculties - largely depends on a number of confusing factors which indicate different levels of funding. The laboratory I've been to was part of both the "Chinese Academy of Sciences" and an "Open Laboratory" (includes the obligation to have international cooperation, to publish many papers and to organise conferences) which means super-funding for Chinese measures.

Indeed the Electroanalytical Chemistry section boasts virtually every instrument one can couple in any way to electrochemistry. A true competence centre for electroanalytical chemistry. Our lab was equipped with 468er PCs running with Windows 3.1 but all the other offices on our floor had new Chinese-brand PCs with Windows 95. Way further down at the Physical Chemistry building the picture is bleak: deserted labs with no piece of equipment which looks like it has been bought in the last 20 years.

Nevertheless the Chinese lab life is considerably slowed down despite relatively up-to-date equipment. There are no ubiquitous water-proof pencils or towels, most equipment is expected to be brought back to its stand-by state (i.e. everything is turned off before the lunch break to wait half an hour after lunch break until the instruments have again warmed up) or covered, there is some time and bureaucracy necessary to get ethanol or other chemicals, small glass vials are former penicillin vials which are fetched from the clinic and generally the Chinese working attitude is more serial and not as anticipating. Another important factor is respect, both to authorities like professors or instruments. Both are best avoided. Knowledge about instruments is rarely profound and instruments capabilities are hardly taken use of. A bad habit is not to let “short term visitors” like me into the well-equipped library.

However there more important problems, at least for the people who work there. It takes some months to get a publication, some more months until the ordered chemicals actually arrive and eventually your idea has already been published by someone else. Simply frustrating.

Eventually my stay was fruitful for both sides. I solved long-standing problems like how to export ASCII data from the Tracor Northern spectrometer, built the first holder for a spectroelectrochemical cell out of my girl friend’s vitamin box, left many IgorPro procedures, a LED and different attitudes on reports, lab journals and the like. I was of course a good opportunity to practise English but was always rewarded by Chinese practice for my “Colloquial Chinese” which saved my day during my later travelling in China and was really very well the effort. Not to mention the many “roasted” and dumplings with Jingzhong, Changwei, Bing and Bingquan, bowling and much more. Its needless to say that the Chinese themselves were the most rewarding part of my stay.

I can only recommend for people who will go to China to also go to some other place as Shanghai or Beijing because I felt they are not very representative, especially Shanghai. And bring some dental floss and vitamins, you will need it.