

理学部見聞録

第4回

Emilia Bergoglio

(生物科学専攻 博士課程 3年生)

profile

2017–Present

PhD course in Biology, Graduate School of Science,
the University of Tokyo

2013 - 2016

Master's Degree in Neuroscience, Department of
Biology, University of Trieste

2010 - 2013

Bachelor of Science in Molecular and Cellular
Biology, Department of Biology, University of Torino

Big carrots, Meisen Kimono, and Rigakubu

“Guys! I'm moving to Japan!” My uttering these words during one of our usual dinner parties in my apartment in Trieste, Italy created great confusion among my friends. They were not wrong to have reservations: after all, I'd never shown any interest in what was considered “Japanese pop culture”, such as anime or video games, nor was I a particular lover of tea or did I want to learn yet another language.

Despite these insurmountable (according to my friends) problems, and in a fashion that is very characteristic of my personality, I packed my bags and moved. What was supposed to be a one-year internship at RIKEN turned out to be a PhD position at the School of Science. What a turn of events!

I'm not going to lie, my reasons for choosing Japan were vague at best, and the first months of my transfer, when the adrenaline of being on the other side of the world waned, were hard. I didn't understand the language, or the people

speaking it for that matter, and don't get me started on something as trivial as grocery shopping (daikon...big carrot?) .

Day by day, though, Japan has grown on me. I started educating myself about its history, traditions, and culture. My lifelong hobby of sewing led me to discover the myriad of traditional fabrics of Japan, and with it kimono. Thanks to these some what very unscientific hobbies, I've made friends, learned enough Japanese to have a conversation on the technological and cultural relevance of Chichibu Meisen (秩父銘仙), and discovered a passion, no, obsession with everything Taishō. I wear kimono frequently (even to the lab, to the great astonishment of my colleagues) and go to the theatre where I deeply enjoy the Edo period pastime of Kabuki.

In complete honesty, I've been lucky. When I was looking for the PhD position I was quite impressed by the abundance of resources which labs in the School of Science seemed to have. I was told I could do any project I could envision, a big change from my previous lab in Italy, where even PhD students are handed a research topic by their bosses. On the other hand, despite having resources, a very nice campus, and in general being located in an awesome city, there seems to be a lack of foreign talent, especially in the fields of life sciences. To be fair, though, in the last couple of years I've noticed a great push towards



Blending with the surroundings...? Photo by Tanita Frey of the School of Pharmacy.

internationalization. This willingness to tackle problems and embrace change is admirable, though the road ahead is still long. For example, having a mandatory course of Scientific English would greatly help young scientists looking for positions and even just conferences abroad. Not only that, but increased transparency may help prospective students decode more of the often Byzantine administration. Despite some evident criticisms, though, my experience in the School of Science is mostly positive. Thanks to a few very patient lab mates, I've been able to navigate multiple walls of Kanji as well as discover particular pieces of the culture I would not have otherwise known (chiefly Asadora) . I've always firmly believed that a university should not only be a place for both broad and narrow academic study, but also one which fosters humanistic qualities such as personal growth, humanity, and compassion. I truly hope the School of Science will not only continue to improve as a research university but also has space for people to grow better.

Another great passion of mine is waste management. Let's fight unnecessary disposal of resources!

