

理学部見聞録

第5回

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A Journey in Japan.

I think that, since I was a teenager, I have always wanted to come to Japan. I was probably influenced a lot by mangas and animes. But as time passed over I kind of forget this idea. Japan was a way too far and expensive country in my eyes. However, when I started to specialize more, following the path to become a seismologist, after a master in exploration Geophysics and a PhD on the mechanics of earthquakes, this idea took over again. Why not go to Japan if I had the occasion? Well this occasion happen after I met my current supervisor in a conference in San Francisco. Before coming to Japan, I had some ideas about how will be my life there. I was expecting state-of-the-art technology everywhere, people that are dressed fancy most of the time, robots walking in the street. The reality is somehow different, people are still using fax and "salarymen" (=business men: サラリーマン) invariably dress in black suits.

Coming to Japan was like entering a new world, where everything is perfectly set, and fixed. The visa process went smoothly, flights are on time, and people were even smiling at the embassy.



Being the highest person in Japan, summit of Fuji san on 17/08/2019.

What is fascinating about Japan is that the contrast between extremes, crawling city that completely stops as soon as you reach the mountains. You can walk in the noisy streets of Akihabara, take randomly the next street and end up in a quiet and peaceful temple like Kanda temple; even there if you look further, you will soon realize that the Ema (絵馬), the small wooden plaque where it is common to write wishes, are not just the one that you will see in every temple, but are actually a continuation of the thrill of the neighborhood. People draw on them manga, in the hope (I guess) to become mangaka. I suspect that Japanese people are actually cultivating this opposition, or maybe in their eyes it is just a continuation, between present and past, noisy to quiet, city to nature.

When leaving Kanda temple, just go out from the main entrance, and turn right. If you walk from around 30 minutes, you will end up in the University of Tokyo. When you are arriving at the University, I recommend you to go through the Akamon Gate (赤門), a strong red wooden gate that a Daijyō had built to welcome his future wife, a daughter of a Shōgun. Continue your path through Sanshiro pond, where you can believe for a few seconds that you are in the middle of a forest. After Sanshiro pond, you should be able to see the school of science. This is where I am passing most of my scientific life. The building itself has nothing special, or maybe I don't know enough about it. If you now enter the building 1 and go to the 7th floor, you will end up in my department (Earth and Planetary science).

It is difficult for me to tell general things about school of sciences, apart that the environment is particularly nice and the administrative staff does a wonderful job. However I can tell more things

Profile

I was born in France and I spend most of my childhood in a region called Auvergne. There is one thing that Japanese people usually know about this region: the water Volvic. I was about to become a geotechnical engineer, until I change my mind in master, to finally become a seismologist. I did a PhD in Paris, specializing in the mechanics of earthquakes, and then move to Japan for a postdoc. My main hobbies are climbing and hiking.



One aspect of Japanese culture, the view of cherry blossom (花見). Photo taken in Chidorigafuji park on 27/03/2019.

about my laboratory. The work-life balance suits me, I still have time to do sports, play videogames, and go to holidays. Professors are even encouraging students to have other activities than just lab-work. I fell very lucky to have met the people in the laboratory. From students to professors, they are not only very good scientists, but they are also very thoughtful and kindhearted people. I do not mean that it is always easy, cultural differences are here. The hierarchy is strong, and it may be difficult to break the ice and make friends at the beginning. However, if you are willing to learn, living to Japan will be an amazing experience.

This is the thing; coming to Japan may be a long journey, with probably some hard time, however if you are patient, every day will bring new discoveries to you. In my opinion, it is not really the objective of your stay that matters, but how you experience it in every day life. One of my last experience in Japan was Yukimizake (雪見酒), please look for it if you are curious. Just an hint, it is related to Sake, Snow, and hotsprings!