



MIA news

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The 'Chengdu International Marathon', and my Homestay Experience

MIA Member - Miura Takamichi

From the 25th of October for the period of a week, I travelled to the city of Chengdu in the province of Sichuan, China, for two reasons. The first of these reasons, and my main reason for travelling, was to participate in the Chengdu International Marathon, continuing on from when I was invited to participate last year by the former CIR, Li Biao.

The other reason for this trip was to enjoy the daily life of fellow retirees through a homestay experience with Li Biao's parents (his father is a year younger than I at 78). Previously, they made their way over to Miyakonojo, where I invited them over to my house for a bit of food and fun, as well as guided them around tourist locations in the area. They are old and close friends, who spent 2-3 days travelling around with me when I last travelled the Sichuan province on bike, and whilst they also invited me last year, I made sure to make the most of my visit again this year by taking them up on their offer to stay with them, and experience their daily life for myself. This made for a much more memorable trip than simply attending a marathon.

Well, with some 30,000 runners at the largest marathon in Sichuan, I was luckily selected through their lottery draw to be one of the participants on the day. As this year marks the 20th Anniversary of Sister City Relations between Miyakonojo City and Jiangjin in Chongqing, I made a show of the run by making a badge with both countries' national flags, as well as 'Japan-China Friendship', which I wore on the front of my jersey during my run. Li Biao wore a 'China-Japan Friendship' badge of the same design on his. We saw the effect of these badges even before we started the race, with people asking「一起合影 可以吗？」(Yìqǐ héyǐng kěyǐ ma, is it okay if we take a photo with you?) both before and during the race, as well as similar comments from previous years such as「你几岁？」(Nǐ jǐ suì, how old are you?) or 「加油、加油！」(Jiāyóu, jiāyóu!; Come on, come on!). Every time I heard someone call out to me during the race, it felt great and filled me with energy, making me even more determined to finish the race. This time around, I ran with Li Biao and their partner, as well as a young friend of theirs who also happened to be their former Japanese teacher. We entered as a group of 4, and it goes without



saying that we all managed to finish (Especially the two ladies who both ran great times, the younger of which set a new personal best!)

After completing the marathon and taking a short break, we travelled over 30km to Li Biao's parents' residence that evening, reuniting with them for the first time in 8 years. I stayed with them for 4 days/3 nights, and as Li Biao and their partner had to return to their own home to prepare for work over the coming days, my new lifestyle suffused with Chinese began. Their parents couldn't speak any Japanese and I have only studied a little Chinese (in particular, not enough to clearly pronounce everything), and so there were a number of occasions where our words weren't getting through to each other. Even with that said, we weren't particularly concerned, as there was a method of communication that we could both yet use: Kanji! As people with the same culture of using Kanji to write, we had a way of understanding each other that is simply not possible with other languages. This is somewhat of a survival technique that I have experienced a number of times during my solo travels. Even if you can't pronounce something correctly, provided you have a way of writing some simple words or passages, there is a great deal you can get across. Provided, of course, that your conversation partner is willing to put in the effort...

In terms of personality, I am the kind of person that always thinks 'it'll work out somehow!' which may help with these kinds of things. The following day, continuing on with daily life without Li Biao there to translate, I was once more surrounded by Chinese, now mixed with a degree of Sichuan dialect, and I was pleased to find myself completely engulfed by the native language around me.

I was not simply spoiled by the home-cooked meals prepared for me while I stayed, but rather took the initiative to make myself a part of the preparation of meals as another family member, and even prepared some Japanese meals for us all to enjoy together. Actually, I had previously received from Li Biao and deep froze a large amount of Matsutake mushrooms, and so I had asked if I could bring some seasonings from Japan with me, and let them know I wanted to cook for them. If you ask any Japanese person about Matsutake mushrooms, they'll let you know it's a high-quality cooking ingredient, and that they'd absolutely love to have some. As I've recently had a bit more interest in cooking,



as soon as I got the go-ahead to cook, I prepared some appropriate seasonings for Matsutake cuisine.

We started off cooking in the Li Biao residence, and they later called their friend to join us the night before the marathon. That night, our menu included 'Matsutake Sukiyaki', 'Chinese-style Matsutake Chimaki', as well as 'Matsutake Soup'. At least, I prepared something of that fashion, but I wonder if it was perhaps in my favour that they weren't well versed in Japanese flavours? In any case, everyone finished it all off saying how delicious it was. The following day, no one fell sick (yay!) and everyone finished with good results, which filled Li Biao's parents with confidence, preparing the same menu once more that evening. However, as we couldn't get our hands on a few ingredients, we swapped out beef for pork, as well as Napa cabbage for Bok-choy, so it became somewhat of a Japanese-Chinese fusion Sukiyaki! Even so, Li Biao's friend invited their partner along to join everyone, and half from its strangeness, half from its flavour, proclaimed it to be delicious and cleaned their plates once more (Maybe also a bit of lip-service...?)



By the way, what kind of daily life do you think retirees such as myself lead in China? As something I hold interest in, I was always following what my host family was up to. We exchanged words with some of their friends, and with the exception of going to some nearby sightseeing spots (things like preserved traditional streetways and such), we went for a walk after breakfast in the local park, enjoyed tea and some lighthearted chat with friends at a local teahouse, took a break and napped on a sofa after lunch, spent the afternoon inviting friends to their house, or being invited by friends to their house to play Mahjong (of course, the missus included), and finished the evening following dinner by walking around the neighbourhood, watching some TV, or reading a book. That this made the base of a typical day is the extent of what I experienced and heard about, and it is truly a relaxed and leisurely lifestyle they lead.

Of course, the family told me that there are a number of ways that people spend their days, but I was interested to find that a number of retired families enjoy each other's company or remain connected to each other, take the initiative to keep themselves moving through walking or other exercise, keep up communication with each other at tea houses, or aim to keep their minds active by playing Mahjong and the like. Amidst this are people taking care of their grandchildren, which gives that feeling of the importance of the household unit. Though I only had the opportunity to see into a small part of their lives, when I reflected back on what I had seen, I felt it was truly a balanced lifestyle. At the very least, to the extent of being somewhat jealous of this family having even more freedom than myself, I certainly wanted to take as a reference for the future the ways in which they make use of their time. As per usual, following this experience I held more of an interest in international exchange, and as someone who has been able to keep up continued exchange with international visitors over the years, alongside my gratitude for such opportunities, I hope that such exchange will continue long into the future.



I always planned to gain an understanding of how 'Japan's common practice is not the world's common practice' as I travel from place to place, and I came across such things this time around as well. Their architecture and food, people's actions and ways of thinking, and in particular this time, considering 'is the way that Chinese people always think about things a completely different measure compared to Japan?' Today, this is the one thing I'd like to focus on. Whenever you finish a marathon at a major competition, you receive a 'Finisher Medal'. The medal I received this time (pictured) compared to last year's medal (at the Kagoshima Marathon) measures in with a weight 5.1 times, and a size (surface area) 3.5 times bigger! It also has a more intricate construction, making it a medal of design and proportions you'd never see in Japan! It was profoundly heavy as I put it around my neck, enough to make your shoulders stiff! One of the great things you can experience when traveling abroad is encountering the things that aren't in Japan... And there were certainly plenty of those on this trip!

 Movies info 	
C-Plaza Cine-port (Tel: 0986-24-2571) 17-9 Nakamachi, Miyakonojo, Miyazaki Map-Code (GPS): 117 488 540*55	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maleficent 2 (Japanese Dub) ● Hood: The Beginning (Japanese Sub) ● Immortal Hero (Japanese) ● Joker (Japanese Sub) ● Way to Find the Best Life (Japanese) ● Ad Astra (Japanese Sub) ● Weathering With You (Japanese) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *The cinema is closed every Tuesday. *For session times visit: http://movie.walkerplus.com/th286/schedule.html (Japanese)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *The 1st of every month is ¥1,100 for everyone. *Every Wednesday is 'Ladies' Day', all ladies ¥1,100. 	