

My HZ+ Thanksgiving



Date: November 28, 2015

Author: Ms Sill

Sorry for the hiatus from this blog, everyone. I haven't been lazy – I promise! If you're interested in the work I've been doing at Hangzhou Plus, you can find all of the articles I've written [here](#).



Speaking of Hangzhou Plus, those of us on the planning committee decided a while back that we wanted to do a Thanksgiving event. After a month or so of planning, we found a venue called Hoka that would allow us to cook using multiple ovens and stove-top burners. Granted they weren't full size ovens, but they were big enough for our needs. Only two of us on the planning committee knew how and were willing to cook – myself and my new friend, Addie Grosse. [Sidebar: Addie is an artist for Hangzhou Plus, drawing wonderful [comics](#) for us. Check them out!]

The good people at Hoka were willing to buy our ingredients ahead of time so they were ready and waiting for us in the kitchen. Hoka is part kitchen showroom part cooking class venue. It was oddly perfect for our needs. The problem was, the dishes we were cooking for Thanksgiving were all foreign conundrums for our Chinese hosts. That meant Addie and I were constantly watched as if we were performing in a magic show – complete with “oohs” and “aahs.” Of course there were

some things the people at Hoka couldn't have known how, what, or where to buy – whipped cream for example. So, the week before, I ventured out to the largest and most comprehensive in-port store in the city.



On the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, Addie, George, and I went in to Hoka to prepare our desserts. We figured that baking the pies ahead of time would cut down on our stress on Thursday. Having divided up the responsibilities for each dish, Addie took charge of the pie recipes and I was her assistant. We planned on making one pumpkin, one chocolate, and one apple pie. That meant we needed four pie crusts (which of course were being made from scratch). Just as I was rolling out the first crust, I requested a pie pan to put it in – not knowing where everything was located in the kitchen we

were using, we had to ask the employees for help. The blank stares I received were not a good omen, nor did they go away when George repeated my inquiry in Chinese. One of the employees retrieved a 4x4 cake pan and held it out to me: “Is ok?” All I could think was: *Have you ever SEEN a pie?!* There was a moment of panic until another employee found these small tins intended for tarts. So, we quickly switched gears and made mini-pies instead. After further rummaging, we found a small frying pan without a handle and decided to use it for the apple pie. From then on out everything went smoothly. The morning of Thanksgiving I woke with a jolt – *If they don't have pie pans, what if they don't have a pan large enough for a turkey?! What will we do?!* My anxiety prompted me to call home for advice. Thank goodness for moms. She was so helpful and calmed me down, renewing my confidence (Thanks mom!). “Thanksgiving isn't a very fun holiday when you have to cook everything,” I said to her, only half joking. “It's much better when all you have to do is show up and eat.” She had a good chuckle about that. Turkey stress didn't end there, however.



Despite his best efforts, George wasn't able to thaw the turkey completely. After all, he only received it in the mail a couple days prior to Thanksgiving. In case you were curious, he [ordered the turkey online](#) from Taobao and it arrived in the mail frozen solid. I was able to thaw it completely in the sink in only two hours – fortunately we arrived at Hoka at noon with a dinner time of 7:30pm. We seemed to be out of the woods with turkey nonsense when we were presented with the perfect size pan and it was just small enough to fit in their largest oven. Unfortunately, the turkey was too heavy for the oven shelf to support it. There was a moment when I was afraid we wouldn't be able to cook it after all of our struggles. Then, Addie and one of the Chinese workers found a metal display rack and we crammed it along with the turkey into the oven just at 2:30pm.



We didn't really have anymore incidents as Addie and I moved forward with the side dishes. Sweet potato casserole, green bean casserole, mashed potatoes, rosemary potatoes, and mashed sweet potatoes were all my responsibility (plus the turkey of course). Meanwhile, Addie was in charge of the stuffing, rolls, cranberry sauce, and pies. I was able to make gravy from some package mixes my family sent me in a care package. Everything came together so well in the end – even the stuff Addie and I were concerned about. (For example, we couldn't find fresh cranberries for the cranberry sauce so we made due with dehydrated cranberries. We soaked them in water to re-hydrate them but it didn't make much of a difference. Once it was on the stove the mixture turned brown instead of red. It tasted fine so we just went with it anyway haha.)



People started arriving around 5pm to help out with some of the remaining dishes. I put my helpers to work peeling potatoes and Addie used some of our extra potatoes to make potato pancakes. The helpers (who were all Chinese) made the pancakes themselves while other helpers made the rolls. As it was getting closer to dinner time, my concern for the turkey returned. *What if it wasn't ready in time?* Fortunately for us, it finished right on schedule so the other dishes didn't get a chance to get cold. However, neither Addie nor I had carved a turkey before so we were at a momentary loss. I eventually bit the bullet and lived by my new life motto: Fake it till you make it.

All in all, everything went very well considering it was my first time cooking a Thanksgiving meal. I'm so grateful to

Addie for being there to struggle through it all with me. Now that it's all said and done, I'm mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted. But I guess I discovered something new about myself and my abilities. When it comes to future Thanksgivings, nothing can compare to the craziness of a Thanksgiving in China.