

Some memories about Yijun Zuo

I met Yijun for the first time in the International Conference on Robust Statistics (ICORS) held in Vorau, Austria, June 23—27, 2001, where he was an invited speaker. He had secured his Ph.D. in 1998 from the University of Texas at Dallas, under the supervision of Professor Robert Serfling. His thesis dealt with measures of depth useful in defining notions like multivariate median and some other robust estimators of the multivariate location parameter.

There were 60 talks. I attended most of the talks. In my memory only the two talks stood out. One was by Yijun Zuo and other was by another young German statistician.

Yijun's talk was on depth functions. It was extremely clear and deep. I was very impressed. During the meeting days I got to spend some time talking with him. At that time, he was holding a tenure track Assistant Professor's position in Arizona State University. During our several conversations he mentioned that he had developed some allergies in Arizona and is thinking of moving from there.

A year later we had an open rank position open. I encouraged him to apply and impressed the committee in our department to invite him for an interview. By this time, he had secured an NSF Young Faculty Career Award, June 2002 to May, 2007. He was recruited in August 2002 as a tenure track Assistant Professor by this department. The then Chair, Habib Salehi worked hard for this. Because of his strong credentials, he was promoted to Associate and then to Full Professor ranks with tenure, in 2003 and 2006, respectively. I was personally very happy about all this and looking forward to the strengthening of a research program in nonparametric statistics in this department.

He has made fundamental contributions to the area of nonparametric statistics dealing with depth measures. No work on this topic is published without mentioning his fundamental contributions.

In the summer of 2006, he and his young family took a trip back home to China. Within a short time of being there he fell sick and was diagnosed in China to have leukemia. The Zuo family cut their visit short to return to East Lansing only to confirm this diagnosis. All this was done by October 2006.

He went to a hospital in Detroit for treatment where his whole family stayed for more than a year. During this time fortunately they found a donor that matched his blood type, and he got a plasma transfusion. During his illness, he read a lot about the disease and found out that leukemia patients are most susceptible to upper bronchitis. He ensured not to be infected by staying in isolation and kept his young kids at home for a year or more. They

were home schooled. During this time, I visited him in Detroit often. By 2008 he had recovered enough to resume regular teaching. During all this time he had not been to any conference or meeting even though he was often invited. But some time in 2010 he went to Prague to attend another ICORS meeting. Unfortunately, he fell sick again and eventually needed a lung transplant. Luckily, that also happened at the right time which kept him among us till now.

I was often in touch with him through emails and zoom during the last ten years. He kept doing research and publishing even being weak. He would often send his papers to me to be among the first to know about his work. I will miss him immensely.

Hira Lal Koul, July 17, 2025.