

Acknowledgements

This marks the end of a significant era in my life, which has been a long and incredible journey. I would simply not have reached this point without being guided by the truth of the world and the courage and confidence instilled into me when a true personal destiny is pursued. Indeed, as Paulo Coelho (author of *The Alchemist*) has pointed out, realising one's destiny is his only obligation and it is just God's blessing for one to do something that fills him with true enthusiasm. I am grateful to this blessing for giving me the imagination, passion, strengths and courage to chase my dream and to fulfil my very destiny.

During this journey, I have been given a good chance to meet wonderful people. As my “promovendus” career spanned two geographic areas – Amsterdam (UvA) and Nijmegen (Donders), I wish to express my gratitude to these people at different places.

In Amsterdam, I am particularly grateful to my promoter Prof. Marian Joëls for providing me with the opportunity to conduct this research that has tremendously consolidated my academic expertise and enhanced my scientific vision. I can easily identify with her ways and goals, and this has underlain a productive collaboration, which I really have enjoyed. Likewise, I am enormously thankful to Dr. Harm Krugers; he is literally the one who led me into this research world, who recognised my capabilities early on, who has taken care of my needs and worried about my worries, and who has continuously supported me.

Also, I am really indebted to Dr. Olof Wiegert, who has provided me with timely assistance and inspired me to explore a world outside academia. I am grateful to Dr. Deborah Alvarez for her kind support since I was still a rookie in the lab. Dr. Yongjun Qin gave me hearty welcome and comfort during my early days in the lab. Ms. Els Velzing has provided enormous support and help, and I truly wish that I could, for most of the time, be surrounded by people just like her. Ming Zhou, MSc has helped stimulate much of my philosophical thinking and made me more aware of my values and beliefs.

There are many other names to which my thankfulness should be attributed; they are: Dr. Paul Lucassen, Dr. Henk Karst, Dr. Rob de Heus, Dr. Lutz Liebmann, Dr. Neeltje van Gemert, Dr. Annelies Olijslagers, Dr. Karin Boekhoorn, Prof. Wytse Wadman, Prof. Menno Witter, Ms. Suharti Maslam, Charlotte Oomen, MSc, Felisa van Hasselt, MSc, Pieter Goltstein, MSc, Edwin Jousma, MSc, Alyssa Thompson, MSc, and Mr. Joseph Mayer.

In Nijmegen, I greatly appreciate the guidance and support received from my co-promoter, Prof. Guillén Fernández. Also, I admire the world-class management he has adopted in steering, delegating, inspiring, and facilitating his team. I would say that this is one of the best places to work in. In his team, I am particularly thankful to Dr. Erno Hermans, who has provided me with unlimited support and invaluable insights. Marloes Henckens, MSc and Krissie Derckx, MSc are the most reliable and effective assistants I have ever known. Hein van Marle, MD offered much insight into the sig-

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

nificance of my work. Ms. Sabine Kooijman provided timely and reliable support for project-related organization, administration, logistics and inventory issues. Ms. Sandra Heemskerk ensured a seamless administrative workflow.

There are also more people in Donders Institute that have made my life there easy; they are: Dr. Guido van Wingen, Atsuko Takashima, MD, PhD, Shaozheng Qin, MSc, Xiao Liu, MSc, Lindsey Ossewaarde, MSc, Marlieke van Kesteren, MSc, and Thijs van de Laar, MSc. Also, I am particularly thankful to Huadong Xiang, MSc, who has provided me with new insights into the IT industry and stimulated a great deal of innovative thinking.

In my personal life, I am especially thankful to Dr. Rui Mang and Ms. Xi Chen. Without their help this achievement would be absolutely unlikely; they are genuinely the people that I can turn to in all sorts of hardships and relying on their comfort and support, I am able to restore my spirit and be ready for good battles. Dr. Rui Mang has also demonstrated to me what a PhD is capable of achieving in a business environment and enhanced my understanding of the significance of high-calibre entrepreneurship in adding value for society. There are also many other friends that have brought fun and enjoyment to my life; they are, to name but a few, Dr. Fenrong Liu, Dr. Maksat Ashyraliyev, Zhengdao Wang, MSc, Ming Wu, MSc, and Antonio Pérez Blázquez, LL.M.

It is also the time for me to express my gratitude to a best friend, Heng Ge, MD, PhD, for his lifelong friendship and support; he has been taking care of my family in Shanghai when they are in need. I am obliged to my parents for their long-term support; they have nurtured my strengths and capabilities in many ways. Last but most importantly, I am deeply indebted to my wife, Jie Xie, who takes care of my needs, who shares my dreams, who permits room and has the patience for my imaginations to turn real, and who has encouraged me by her own successes in making things happen. Jie, you are a wonderful wife!

Zhenwei