



Tateshina Conference on Organic Chemistry

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It was on a sunny day in May 2000 during the Bürgenstock Conference that Eiichi Nakamura and I, while walking through a village, discussed the possibility of having a similar conference in Japan, in particular to strengthen ties between Asian chemists. Although it is widely recognized that the field of organic chemistry is growing rapidly, few channels are available for the smooth exchange of information and for making contacts with scientists outside limited personal connections. It follows that the chemical community in Asia and even worldwide would benefit a great deal from the organization of a new network.

Immediately after returning to Japan, Eiichi took action. He called his colleagues and organized a preliminary conference in November to try out a new conference style. It would be of no use to simply add a new similar international conference to the many others that exist today. Our intention was to offer chemists a forum where close scientific relationships and friendships would be nurtured. Interdisciplinary contacts in a relaxed atmosphere should allow the participants to discover new aspects of science and society. Tateshina was chosen as the conference site because it is a resort located in the central part of the main island (Honshu) of Japan (Figure 1). At this meeting, a con-



Figure 1. The countryside around Tateshina inspires creativity.

sensus was reached that the key concept of the conference should be “diversity”: diversity of participants in terms of nationality, experience, and standing, diversity of culture, and diversity of science, which is, of course, most important in the context of the interdisciplinary character of modern organic chemistry. Nowadays, organic chemistry serves as the core science for a variety of disciplines, including medicinal chemistry, pharmacology, biology, and materials science. Accordingly, the speakers should not only be organic chemists, but scientists from a broad spectrum of fields. We tend to be trapped by our own narrow specialty in our busy daily life, and it is necessary to set ourselves free from routine on occasion. We hoped that the conference would provide the participants with the break they need to restore them with a broader overview. It was planned that the conference would be composed of scientific lectures, outdoor activities, a music concert, and get-togethers with excellent food and drinks. Although the number of participants would be limited to 70, it should be a balanced mixture of younger and older, academic and industrial chemists, with a number of Asian countries represented. However, speakers were not only to be invited from Asia, but from all over

the world, to insure the scientific quality of the conference.

With these goals in mind, an organizing committee was set up with eminent and—by Japanese standards—relatively young chemists: Eiichi Nakamura (Univ. Tokyo, chairman), Makoto Fujita (Univ. Tokyo), Terunori Fujita (Mitsui Chemicals), Takehiko Iida (Banyu Pharm. Co.), Keiji Maruoka (Kyoto Univ.), and Keisuke Suzuki (Tokyo Institute of Technology). (These were the committee members in 2003; some of the original members from 2001 are no longer on the committee.) In addition, Eun Lee (Seoul Nat. Univ.), Tien-Yau Luh (Academia Sinica), and Henry N. C. Wong (Chinese Univ. Hong Kong) were solicited to serve as regional liaison officers. Tateshina was reconfirmed as the conference location. It is isolated but readily accessible from major Japanese cities by both train and car, and first-class hotel accommodation is available at reasonable off-season prices in mid-November. There is a nice concert hall, which can be used as a lecture theater, with the name “Harmony-no-Ie” (The House of Harmony): how fitting with the concept of the conference! A variety of options are available for outdoor activities. There are tennis courts, golf courses, and historic places to visit nearby. One

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can also go hiking in mountains that are 2000-m high. Furthermore, this resort is surrounded by excellent restaurants. As a natural consequence, the conference was named the “Tateshina Conference on Organic Chemistry”.

Following the preliminary meeting, the first Tateshina Conference took place from November 9 to 11, 2001. The commemorative first lecture of the conference was delivered by Teruaki Mukaiyama. Many renowned and promising scientists have since been speakers at the conference, including in 2001: N. Kashiwa (Mitsui Chemicals), G. Kiedrowski (Univ. Bochum), T. Mukaiyama (Sci. Univ. Tokyo), K. C. Nicolaou (Scripps Res. Inst.), H. Okayama (Univ. Tokyo), and D. Uemura (Nagoya Univ.); and in 2002: S. Chan (Academia Sinica), C.-H. Jun (Yonsei Univ.), S. Matile (Geneva Univ.), S. Nishimura (Fujisawa Pharm. Co.), R. Noyori (Nagoya Univ.), and K. Nozaki (Univ. Tokyo).

The third conference, held from November 14 to 16, 2003, continued this tradition. About 70 people from both academia and industry assembled from Asia (China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand), Europe (Germany and Spain), Israel, USA, and Japan. The topics of the lectures included pure synthetic chemistry, bio-organic chemistry, natural product synthesis, and materials science. The lineup of speakers was very diverse, and their ages ranged from about 30 to over 80. The conference was initiated by Eun Lee (Seoul Nat. Univ.) on the afternoon of November 14. He presented his elegant natural product synthesis based on radical chemistry. New in 2003 were short presentations on topical subjects: Antonio M. Echavarren (Univ. Autónoma de Madrid) spoke on the catalytic activation of alkynes, and Peter Göllitz (Wiley-VCH) on the growing impact of the journal *Angewandte Chemie*. In the evening, after dinner in a Chinese restaurant, two giants of organic chemistry led us through its history in the 20th century. John D. Roberts (California Institute of Technology)

showed us interesting pictures of many famous organic chemists who have already become somewhat legendary to younger participants. Gilbert Stork (Columbia University, New York) impressed the audience with a chronological story of his magnificent career in chemistry.

The second day was filled with a colorful program. First, in the early morning, we moved to the forefront of scientific research from the glorious foundations established in the 20th century highlighted the evening before. Sumio Iijima (Meijo Univ.) gave an impressive talk on carbon nanotubes. He delivered a lecture on the state of the art of technology and advances in materials science. After this lecture, we went out for outdoor activities.

It can be cold and even snow at this time of year in Tateshina, as it is situated at a high altitude. However, following in the tradition of the previous three years we were lucky and encountered no bad weather. The participants enjoyed a variety of activities in beautiful sunshine. Particular mention must be made of the tennis played by G. Stork and J.D. Roberts. They surprised us with their competitiveness, and never gave the impression that the two men playing were over 80 (Figure 2). We learned from them that a young spirit keeps you energetic and successful.

A poster session followed the outdoor activities. More than 30 posters were displayed, and heated discussions lasted until the end of the session. A splendid flute concert by Masahiro Arita and Shizu Saito was the final event in the official program for the day. A French dinner followed the concert. Every year the dinner is superb: the chef always impresses us with his skill of making use of local ingredients. In typical Japanese custom, the gathering after dinner with beer, wine, and whisky went on until midnight.



Figure 2. S. Nakamura, D. Uemura, G. Stork, and J. D. Roberts (left to right) after the tennis match.

The scientific session of the third day began with lectures by young chemists. Kazuhiko Nakatani (Kyoto Univ.) and Zuwei Xie (Chinese Univ. Hong Kong) spoke about small molecular ligands binding to mismatched DNA and cyclopentadienyl-carboranyl hybrid compounds, respectively. In the final lecture Ehud Keinan (Technion, Haifa) gave us a futuristic view on DNA computing. The program finished before noon as scheduled, and the participants left Tateshina greatly satisfied.

I hope that the reader has formed an impression of what the Tateshina conference is like. In my opinion it has already established a place for itself in the international chemistry calendar. So, what is the future? It is not easy to foresee what will happen in the relatively long term. Nevertheless, I am sure that organic chemistry will continue to occupy a central position in the scientific world, because it is the key to the development and supply of organic materials. In this sense, the current concept and style of the conference will be retained for several years at least. It is our goal to establish this unique conference firmly in Asia in the near future.

Although this conference is not open to everyone, those who are interested should contact Professor Eiichi Nakamura (nakamura@chem.s.u-tokyo.ac.jp).