

First Meeting Held of Asian Heads of Research Councils

On 27-30 November, an inaugural meeting of the Asian Heads of Research Councils, or ASIAHORCs for short, was held at The Westin Miyako Hotel in Kyoto. It brought together for the first time the heads and top representatives of Asia's major science-promotion agencies under one roof.

Background

ASIAHORCs meetings are held as a core component of the "Strategic Program for Building an Asian Science and Technology Community," which JSPS has been commissioned to implement under the Special Coordination Funds for Promoting Science and Technology operated by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Launched in FY 2006, this program is aimed at establishing strategic partnerships between Japan and the countries of Asia amidst rapidly advancing S&T development in the region.

ASIAHORCs meetings place special focus on strengthening the region's scientific research networks, as intra-regional collaborations on a par with those carried out in Europe and North America have yet to materialize in Asia. It was against this backdrop that JSPS decided to convene ASIAHORCs meetings to build a robust network among a cadre of leading research-funding agencies that together shoulder the impetus for advancing scientific research in the wider Asian region. Toward this end, the meetings offer the "heads of Asian research councils" an ideal venue for exchanging views and deepening mutual understanding.

First ASIAHORCs Meeting

Participating in the first ASIAHORCs meeting were representatives of science-promotion agencies from eight Asian countries, including the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC), Korea Science and Engineering Foundation (KOSEF), Vice-Chancellors' Council of National Universities in Malaysia (VCC), Department of Science and Technology (DOST) (Philippines), Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR) (Singapore), National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT), Vietnamese Academy of Science and Technology (VAST), and JSPS, which hosted the meeting. Observers from the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology (MoRST) (New Zealand), National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) (Thailand), Ritsumeikan University, and other institutions also attended.

On the 28th, an opening ceremony was held. It was addressed by His Imperial Highness Prince Akishino, who spoke of how an uplifting of the spirit is found in scientific pursuit, likening the history of scientific advancement to footprints left by humankind in its quest to satisfy our eternal yearning for the truth. He said what a wonderful thing it is that Asian nations can collaborate in tackling shared issues through a multilateral relationship of mutual trust and confidence, and how scientific advances made within the Asian community will ultimately accrue to the well-being and happiness of people around the world. Prince Akishino's remarks were followed by a congratulatory message from MEXT vice minister Mr. Masami Zeniya.

A keynote speech, entitled “21st Century Science from Asia” was given by Dr. Masatoshi Koshihara, 2002 Nobel Laureate in Physics. He delivered a powerful message on the need for Asian partners to pool both their intellectual and financial resources in building the world’s loftiest research facilities so as to forge quantum advances in frontier research within the region and foster excellent young Asian researchers through participation in joint research at them.

Following the keynote address, presentations were given by the heads and representatives of each agency. Views they expressed and the ensuing discussions worked to deepen mutual understanding among the members along with a shared perception of the need for international collaboration to solve common problems within the region and to cultivate upcoming generations of researchers.

The program on the 29th started with a workshop featuring presentations by Dr. David Swinbanks, CEO, NPG Nature Asia-Pacific, and Dr. Shin-ichi Kurokawa, High Energy Accelerator Research Organization (KEK). Spurred on by their messages, the members engaged each other in a spirited exchange of views on the prospects of building a vibrant pan-Asian research network. It was agreed by all to continue holding ASIAHORCs meetings, with JSPS hosting the 2008 meeting and KOSEF the 2009 one. It was also agreed to set up a working group to consider the future composition of ASIAHORCs membership and the details of future collaborative initiatives. It was decided that JSPS would serve as the secretariat for the working group.

After the meeting, the participants visited Kyoto University, where they received a briefing on the university’s international exchange activities within Asia from its vice president Dr. Toshio Yokoyama, who is also the director-general of its Organization for the Promotion of International Relations. Then, Prof. Norio Nakatsuji, director of the Institute for Integrated Cell-Material Sciences, discussed with the members the latest research results attained on embryonic stem cell research at the Institute, which had been selected for a grant under the MEXT/JSPS program World Premier International Research Center Initiative. On the 30th, some of the participants made a visit to the Nara Institute of Science and Technology, where the faculty discussed with them the institute’s international exchanges and research projects and led them on a tour of its research facilities.

Future Vista

With JSPS and KOSEF scheduled to host the next two annual meetings, ASIAHORCs promises to be a solid platform for advancing an ongoing, candid exchange of views on ways to advance international collaboration based on a discussion of the S&T policy trends, research priorities and societal issues in each country of the Asian community.

JSPS president Prof. Motoyuki Ono chose the city of his alma mater Kyoto University as the venue to host his Asian colleagues in the first ASIAHORCs meeting. Kyoto is not only Japan’s oldest and most traditional city, but is also a matrix for fostering highly creative scientists, including Nobel laureates in physics and chemistry. In this sense, it lends itself most fittingly to the Japanese-adopted Chinese philosophy of *onko-chishin*, to derive new knowledge by delving into what is old. This is precisely what the ASIAHORCs meeting sought to

accomplish: To build upon long-established bi- and multilateral milestones of collaboration to germinate new seeds of partnership in building a more holistic Asian S&T community. This Kyoto-endowed attribute combined with the November peak season for the city's famous autumn colors underscored Prof. Ono's decision on where and when to host the inaugural meeting of the Asian Heads of Research Councils.



Prof. Motoyuki Ono, JSPS



His Imperial Highness Prince Akishino



Mr. Masami Zeniya, MEXT



Prince Akishino and Participants



Keynote Speech: Dr. Koshiba



Presentation Session



Presentation Session



Presentation Session



Presentation Session



Presentation Session



Work shop



Work shop



Group Photo