

Report on the 20th IUBMB - 11th FAOBMB Congress 2006

This report, written by Phillip Nagley and Rohan Baker, was published in the December 2006 issue of the Australian Biochemist and is reproduced with their permission.

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General Aspects of the Congress

The 20th IUBMB Congress was held in conjunction with the 11th FAOBMB Congress, in Kyoto, 18-23 June 2006. The meeting was imbued with Japanese ambience and the warm hospitality displayed by our hosts made the Congress a delightful and memorable occasion. The Congress was held in the Kyoto International Conference Hall (KICHH), in the beautiful city of Kyoto, once the national capital of Japan in the Shogun era. The theme of the Congress was 'Life: Molecular Integration and Biological Diversity'.

There were in excess of 9,000 registrants from 71 countries, including 1,000 foreign speakers and 2,000 foreign delegates, with one-third of the delegates being young scientists. There were 5,000 abstracts altogether. So by all accounts this was a successful congress of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. There were many members of the two Japanese Societies, the Japanese Biochemical Society and the Molecular Biology Society of Japan (they never seemed to have merged B with MB in Japan, in contrast to many other countries of the world – the B society in Japan was holding its 79th annual meeting while the MB Society was some 50 years

younger, holding its 29th annual meeting, both in conjunction with the Congress itself). Additionally, there seemed to be many delegates from the well developed biotechnology industry in Japan. There were more than 200 booths at the Trade Exhibition, most of these aimed squarely at the Japanese registrants, with little evidence of English in the displays or the printed material. But most of the company names were very familiar to us. One interesting feature of the Congress was the array of company - sponsored sessions that provided breakfasts, lunches or even early dinners, at which product analyses and promotions were presented to hundreds of hungry and thirsty delegates.



Kyoto International Conference Hall

Plenary Speakers

The quality of presentations by plenary speakers in many respects sets the tone for the other features of a conference, especially where there are subsequent multiple parallel sessions. This was certainly the case with the Kyoto Congress, where the plenary speakers maintained the superlative standards that one expects to find at an International Congress of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. Of the eleven Plenary lectures, five were IUBMB Named Lectures, two were FAOBMB Named Lectures and a further two were designated joint IUBMB/FAOBMB Named Lectures. The quality of the speakers and the breadth of the topic areas that they covered in biology and biomedicine at the molecular level are evident from the list in the Box below.

Plenary lectures at IUBMB Congress 2006 in Kyoto

IUBMB/FAOBMB Lecture: Charles Zuker (USA)

The biology of mammalian taste

IUBMB Slater Lecture: Pascale Cossart (France)

Host-pathogen interactions: the Listeria paradigm

IUBMB Lecture: Gerald Hart (USA)

Two decades of O-GlcNAc: emerging roles as a nutrient/stress sensor globally regulating signalling, transcription, and protein turnover

IUBMB Ochoa Lecture: David Baulcombe (UK)

RNA silencing in plant development

FAOBMB Murachi lecture: Zhu Chen (China)

Systems biology and leukemia: a track towards the cure

IUBMB Beatty Lecture: Tak Mak (Canada)

Cell death in the immune system

FAOBMB Lecture: Yoshinori Ohnishi (Japan)

Cellular recycling system - molecular dissection of autophagy

FEBS Lecture: Iain Mattaj (Germany)

The RAN GTPase as a spatial regulator in mitosis

Nishizuka Lecture: Hans Clevers (The Netherlands)

Wnt and Notch cooperate to maintain proliferative compartments in crypts and intestinal neoplasia

FAOBMB/IUBMB Yagi Lecture: Bruce Stillman (USA)

The initiation of chromosome DNA replication in eukaryotes and its relationship to chromosome segregation

FAOBMB Svasti Lecture: Sunghoon Kim (Korea)

Functional network of aminoacyl-tRNA synthetases and human disease

Symposia and Posters

There were 89 symposia, often with as many as ten running concurrently. This made choice somewhat difficult at times, but there was something to interest almost everybody in the great range of topics covered. There were about 4,000 posters presented, spread across the five days of the Congress and between three locations, two of which were in huge marquees. The posters were organised into more than 140 different topic areas, which although requiring a huge logistical operation to organise into a coherent program, ended up being relatively easy for participants because posters in closely related areas were clustered in each of the three venues. The weather was hot and humid and it was fortunate that each of the poster venues had ample supplies of chilled drinks.



Temple close to the main Kyoto railway station

Young Scientist Program

A major section of the conference highlighted the work of 98 emerging young scientists, mostly graduate students, drawn from countries all over the world, in the Young Scientists Program. The overseas participants in this program all received assistance to attend in the form of Travel Fellowships (after review of their competitive applications). The participants held a three-day meeting before the main Congress, in a hotel in Kyoto, separate from KICH where the main Congress was held.



The famous Golden Pavilion in Kyoto

Social Events and Official Functions

One highlight of the meeting was the afternoon tea ceremony prior to the opening ceremony, held in the presence of the Crown Prince of Japan. The detailed prior arrangements and security checks on the day did not detract from the interest of this occasion, where the Crown Prince was able to address and to meet with specially invited delegates, most of whom had strong IUBMB or FAOBMB connections, or were invited international speakers at the Congress. The Crown Prince also made a speech at the formal opening ceremony later in the afternoon to the assembled participants at the Congress.

There were the usual welcome receptions and banquet functions, all catered lavishly with numerous Japanese dishes in dazzling arrays. We also were privileged to attend a number of specially sponsored lunches or dinners put on by ASBMB (USA) and its publication the Journal of Biological Chemistry, the Chinese Biochemical Society, the British Biochemical Society and so on. These functions provided excellent networking opportunities with people with strong professional engagement from all over the world.

IUBMB General Assembly

The 19th Ordinary General Assembly of IUBMB took place on 24 June, the day after the congress itself had concluded. Phillip and Rohan were appointed by the Australian Academy of Science as Adhering Body to IUBMB, on the recommendation of ASBMB Council, to represent Australia at this formal triennial business meeting of IUBMB.



Phillip Nagley and Rohan Baker enjoying a traditional Japanese meal