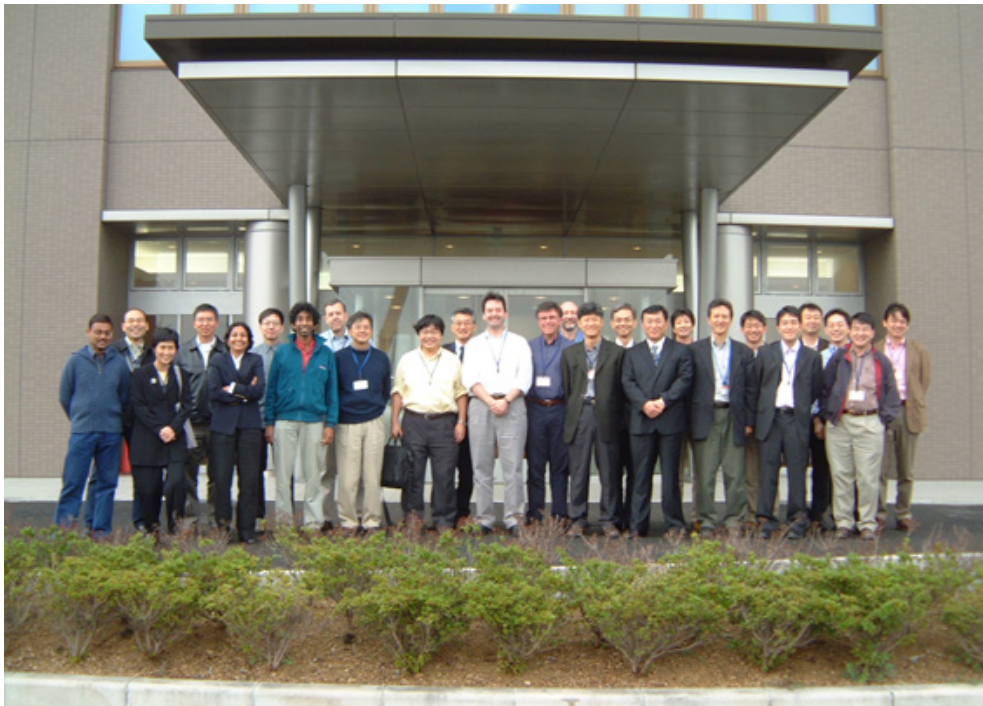


RIKEN Center for Developmental Biology (CDB)
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CDB hosts first Asia-Oceania fish meeting

November 16, 2004 – On November 15 and 16, the RIKEN Center for Developmental Biology (CDB; Kobe, Japan), in coordination with the RIKEN Brain Science Institute (BSI), hosted a meeting attended by researchers from throughout the Asia-Oceania region engaged in study of zebrafish and medaka biology. The meeting program included talks by a total of 19 speakers from South Korea, China, Singapore, Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand, as well as from within Japan, covering the development, neurobiology and genomics of these increasingly popular model organisms. In addition to those delivering talks, many researchers from within Japan participated as session chairs or members of the audience, bringing the total attendance to the two-day conference to 111. This was the first regional meeting to be held in these fields in the Asia-Pacific region, and scientists made the most of the opportunity to discuss their work as well as the potential for increased exchange and collaboration in this part of the world.

Masahiko Hibi (Team Leader, Laboratory for Vertebrate Axis Formation), who served as the meeting organizer, commented on the event:



“In the zebrafish and medaka research community, there is already an ongoing series of international meetings held every year alternating between venues in Europe and the US, and here in Japan, there’s an annual conference called the Japanese Medaka and Zebrafish Meeting. In Japan, the medaka has traditionally been the small fish model of choice, and now with the more recent advent of the zebrafish as a vertebrate model of equal utility, we’ve seen what could fairly be called an explosion in the number of scientists studying these small fish models. Young researchers in particular have been returning from working as postdocs for a few years in major labs overseas and setting up their own research units here in the

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Asia-Oceania region, and I think as a result of that we've seen an impressive rise in the quality of work being done here.

With all these recent developments in the field, the timing seemed right for us working here in this area to organize a regional meeting that would be large enough to represent the activity of many labs from across the region, while at the same time intimate enough to allow for meaningful opportunities for discussion and the open exchange of information and views, meaning it needed to be much smaller than the worldwide meeting, which have on the order of 2,000 attendees. In fact, Hitoshi Okamoto at the RIKEN BSI and Hiroyuki Takeda at the University of Tokyo (who were co-organizers of this year's meeting), had been planning to hold an Asia-Oceania Fish Meeting in 2003, but the SARS outbreak meant that event had to be postponed. This year, I happened to be one of the organizers of the Japanese Medaka and Zebrafish Meeting, which was held here in Kobe on November 14th, and with the support of the CDB, we were able to host the Asia-Oceania conference here at the Center on the two days following the Japanese meeting.

One of the main goals for holding this kind of meeting is to provide opportunities for personal contacts and exposure to the work in other labs in the same geographical region, so we hoped to get at least the principal investigators from the active labs in these fields to attend. We invited 13 speakers from other countries as well as six from within Japan as speakers, and a number of the overseas speakers were also able to attend the Japanese meeting on the 14th and gave either oral or poster presentations of their work. Last year, presentations at the domestic meeting were given in Japanese, but this year both the oral and poster sessions were in English, which allowed for more meaningful participation by non-Japanese scientists. I think because of that, people who attended the meeting came away with a better appreciation of the level research activity in these fields.

At the international meetings held in Europe and America, talks are kept short and there's little time for discussion, but we wanted to give speakers at the Asia-Oceania meeting enough time to present their work in detail, so the length of the oral presentations was set to 30 minutes per talk. I think that made for a much more fruitful meeting in the sense that speakers had the time to show their work in greater depth, and the audience was able to engage extensively with presenters immediately following each talk. And after hearing the presentations by all 19 speakers, I have to say it reinforced my sense of the overall quality of the work being done in zebrafish and medaka labs here in this part of the world.

As this was the first meeting of its kind, Hitoshi Okamoto of the BSI organized a regional community meeting following the conclusion of the scientific program on the evening of the first day. This served as a useful chance to discuss further activities for researchers in these fields, and led to a number of decisions regarding the size and nature of future regional fish biology meetings. People agreed that the Asia-Oceania meeting should be held once every two years and that it should be kept small enough to allow for the kinds of interactivity we saw at this year's meeting by limiting participation to 2-3 people from any given lab, with PIs invited to give talks and postdocs and grad students giving poster presentations. There was also a consensus that the next meeting should be held in a different part of the region, such as Singapore and that additional avenues for international exchange should be developed. Much discussion was also devoted to proposals to develop collaborations towards the development of a large-scale fish mutant database.

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The need for more interaction here in the Asia-Pacific region isn't limited to the fields of zebrafish and medaka research. It's becoming clearer that intraregional exchange activities by the scientific community at the national level – and by that I don't just mean participation in international meetings, but actual collaborations and joint programs between labs in neighboring countries – are necessary to bringing the level of science up to even higher standards. I'll be happy if the Asia-Oceania Fish Meeting served as at least an initial step in that direction."