

RIKEN Center for Developmental Biology (CDB)
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First East Asia *C. elegans* Meeting Held in Awajishima

July 30, 2004 – A regional meeting covering *C. elegans* research in East Asia was convened from June 28 to July 1 on the island of Awajishima in Hyogo Prefecture, Japan. The meeting, which received financial support from the RIKEN Center for Developmental Biology (CDB; Kobe, Japan) and the Hyogo International Association, was held to explore the possibilities of a forum providing scientists from East Asia with the opportunity to hold discussions and present their findings in English. 190 *C. elegans* researchers from 7 countries, including Japan, South Korea, China and Taiwan, attended the meeting and presented their work in fields ranging from development to the nervous system to aging.



Organizers of the East Asia *C. elegans* Meeting
From left: Junho Lee (Yonsei University, Korea), JooHong Ahnn (KJIST, Korea),
Hitoshi Sawa (CDB), Asako Sugimoto (CDB)

Hitoshi Sawa (Team Leader; Laboratory for Cell Fate Decision), who served as the meeting's head organizer, comments:

"There's already an international meeting of *C. elegans* researchers held every other year in the US, and in the off years there are a number of regional meetings in various parts of the world – three locations in America and one in Europe. Since 1998, Japan has also held national meetings every two years, but the official language of those meetings is Japanese, so the attendees are nearly entirely from

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Japan. This year, we wanted to try to take that to the next stage by holding the meeting in English and encouraging *C. elegans* researchers from throughout East Asia to attend. As with other meetings in the *C. elegans* community, short talks of around ten minutes in length given by students and postdocs form a central part of the program.

My biggest worry before the meeting was whether everyone would be able to present their work clearly in English, and I could see that it was a real challenge for some of the presenters to prepare and give their talks. There were a few times when a speaker struggled during the Q&A session, but the presentations themselves went very well; there were even a few students who spoke English at an extremely high level of fluency. I think the biggest achievement of this meeting was demonstrating that it's possible to hold a successful English-language scientific meeting here in Japan. When we held a poll two years ago about the idea of holding an East Asia meeting, a lot of people expressed concern, but in the follow-up survey to the recent meeting in Awajishima, the majority of respondents were positive about continuing with this system. At the Japanese Biochemical Society meeting this year as well, all of the symposia will be held in English, and I think we're going to see more and more scientific meetings in this country following that route.

Another experiment we tried at this meeting was to allow speakers to hold poster discussions after their talks. During coffee breaks or immediately after the end of a session, presenters were at their poster boards to talk more about their findings using print-outs of their presentation materials. At many meetings, there isn't always time to ask your question during the Q&A period after a talk or sometimes you just can't put it into words right away. Speakers are sometimes frustrated too, because they aren't able to get feedback and input from as many people as they might like. The poster discussion system eliminates these problems completely. We originally planned the idea as a kind of backup system out of concern that there would be problems with Q&A sessions in English, but it ended up playing a much bigger role than that, and everyone was really enthusiastic about the way it worked out: 98% of the people who answered the survey after the meeting said they liked it. I think this would be a good feature to build into the program at other scientific meetings as well, whenever time allows.