German JSPS Alumni Talk about Past and Future Successes of Their Association

2015 marks the twentieth year since the German alumni association (German JSPS Club) was established in 1995. To celebrate this anniversary, a symposium on the theme “The Role of Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Energy Supply” was held by JSPS and the Club at Meiji University in Tokyo. It was attended by some 120 people, including many from Germany.

Currently, there are 14 JSPS alumni associations in operation around the world. With cooperation from JSPS’s Tokyo headquarters and Bonn Office, the German JSPS Club carries out a wide range of self-initiated, creative activities. Members of the association who came to Japan to attend the symposium talked to the Quarterly staff about what it is that has made the German JSPS Club so successful over a continuum of 20 years.

What’s the secret to the Club’s 20 years of success?

In answering this question, “personal relationships” was the first thing mentioned by Ms. Sabine Ganter-Richter (the Club’s public relations officer). A stalwart of the Club’s operation since its establishment, she spoke from experience when she told us about the members: They’ve all had highly positive experiences in Japan, making the Club an “interest group,” permeated with a family atmosphere, in Japanese culture. The Club’s treasurer Dr. Arnulf Jäger-Waldau emphasized “commitment” as being instrumental, explaining that the members pay dues and act as a group upon what they agree to do.

Club chair Prof. Heinrich Menkhaus said almost spontaneously that the secret to the Club’s success is “responsibility”—particularly that which the executive board exercises in support the association. He noted that any board member seen to neglect that responsibility would be replaced. Prof. Ivor Fleck (prizes officer) said that “hard work” underlies the association’s success, telling us with glee about how hard work has paid big dividends in building the alumni network. Dr. Wolfgang Staguhn (membership officer) said that it is no secret that “good communication” and “joint decisions” are key elements of the Club’s excellent performance. He went on to say that the members are all interested in and even love Japan, and are committed to their relationships with Japanese colleagues. He stressed that the successes achieved by the Club wouldn’t be possible if it weren’t for the support it receives from JSPS’s Bonn Office. Past Club chairman Prof. Uwe Czarnetzki was animated in quoting three reasons for the association’s success: “enthusiasm,” “nice members,” and “JSPS support.” It’s his belief that the secret to the Club’s success is “responsibility”—particularly for its many and various contributions to promoting a relationship of neighborly friendship with Japan.

For the Next 20 Years

We asked what the members will do propel the alumni association’s success over the next 20 years. We were told that their plan is to promote exchange between young researchers just returning from Japan and mid-career and senior researchers, and to help young researchers welcomed into the Club advance their careers. Dr. Chantal Weber (newsletter editor) stressed that to sustain the Club’s success, it will need to act as a mentor to its younger members. Dr. Weber said that before participating in a JSPS program she heard about the Club from Prof. Ingrid Fritsch, a board member at the time, and had joined some Club events. Those experiences having sparked her interest, she came to Japan to do research under a JSPS postdoctoral fellowship. Furthermore, some Club members encourage students in their labs to study in Japanese universities, and have even sent their sons and daughters to Japan to do so as well. In this way, the members are passing the baton of German-Japanese exchange on to the younger generation.

The reception of the 20-year anniversary symposium was attended by JSPS academic advisor Dr. Makoto Asashima, executive directors Dr. Yasuhiko Iye and Mr. Takaaki Iwasa, former president Prof. Motoyuki Ono along with past generations of Bonn Office members. At it, a brightly costumed street musician (chindonya) performance was put on as a gift to the new generation of alumni. Not even the Japanese have many opportunities to see this culturally steeped traditional performing art. We believe that the upcoming generation of JSPS alumni will take on new challenges while sustaining the pride and spirit of their forerunners.

Our eyes remain riveted on the German JSPS Club’s future program innovations and successes.

20 Years of Cooperation between the German JSPS Club and Bonn Office

The Club was established in 1995 as an alumni association covering Germany and German-speaking regions. Receiving strong support under its partnership with JSPS and the JSPS Bonn Office and also utilizing its own financial resources, the Club carries out an array of German-Japanese exchange activities. Two decades having elapsed, this year the Club boasts a 400-person membership. Among the Club’s main activities are holding annual Japanese-German Symposia jointly with the Bonn Office, publishing the newsletter Neues vom Club, reporting on cutting-edge scientific developments in Germany and Japan, and issuing the association’s own “Club Award” to persons with an outstanding record of achievements in building collaborative bridges between Germany and Japan. In July 2012, the Japanese government awarded the German JSPS Club the Foreign Minister’s Commendation (Group) for its many and various contributions to promoting a relationship of neighborly friendship with Japan.

Bonn Office Director Receives Commendation

JSPS Bonn Office director Prof. Keiichi Kodaira was awarded the Foreign Minister’s Commendation (Individual), which was presented to him by Mr. Takeshi Nakane, Ambassador of Japan, at the JSPS Abend held in Bonn on September 2nd. After receiving a doctorate from Kiel University, he held successive posts at Heidelberg University and Technische Universität Berlin (TU Berlin). As the director of JSPS’s Bonn Office, he has over long years strived to advance exchange between Japanese and German researchers by strengthening JSPS’s network with counterpart German agencies. It was out of recognition for the extensive contributions he has made to Japanese-German exchange that Prof. Kodaira was awarded this prestigious commendation. He expressed gratitude at the Abend, saying the award is attributable to everyone who has supported the Bonn Office’s activities.

Attended by representatives of German science-promotion agencies and universities, the annual Abend is held by JSPS and the Bonn Office to report their activities over the past year and thank their German counterparts for cooperating in carrying them out. At this year’s Abend, a dynamic lecture was given by Prof. Eiichiro Komatsu, director, Max Planck Institute for Astrophysics, on frontiers being pioneered in his field of astrophysics.

For more information on the German JSPS Club, please see the following website: www.jsps-club.de/