

Acceptance Speech of

Koji Nakanishi

Co-Winner of the 2003

King Faisal International Prize for Science

Saturday 8.3.2003 (5.1.1424H)

On November 26th, Tuesday, an International Symposium in Memory of Professor Y. Hirata, Nagoya University, under whose guidance I received my Ph.D. in 1954, was held in Nagoya. The six speakers included Professor Ryoji Noyori of Nagoya University and Professor Barry Sharpless of the Scripps Institute, both 2000 Nobel Laureates and awardees of the King Faisal International Prize in Science in 1999 and 1995, respectively, and myself. On the train back to Tokyo on November 27th, I purchased a morning paper to catch up with the news. It was there that I found a picture of myself and the unexpected and surprising announcement that Professor Frederick Hawthorne and I had been awarded the highly prestigious 2003 King Faisal International Prize in Science that rotates among biology, physics, mathematics and chemistry. The local paper also mentioned that the King Faisal prize was one of the world's pre-eminent awards. Upon my return to Columbia University, I found the press release and documents sent to our chairman as well as myself. I certainly was aware of the Prize but it was remote name for me, and never expected that I would be a recipient.

Besides the above two, all four other awardees in chemistry were my close and respected friends. Needless to mention, I was delighted and most honored to know through a most unusual manner, on board a train alone, that I also would now be a member of this highly prestigious group.

Although I have never been to Saudi Arabia, I have a feeling of special intimacy. My father was a banker working for a Japanese bank and was sent

to their overseas branches. Thus after being born in Hong Kong in 1925, I spent three to four years in Lyon and London, and then in Egypt, I started my schooling at the British Boys School in Alexandria in 1933 and stayed there until 1937 when my parents returned to Japan. The primary school still exists but of course under a different name. At the school in Alexandria, I learned to speak and write in Arabic, although regretfully I have forgotten my Arabic.

The name of King Faisal Foundation immediately gives others and me a feeling of respect. This is because of its generous and warm support of various ventures in philanthropy, humanities and science. The news of me being the recipient of the 2003 Science Award soon became known to the community through various media, newspapers, magazines, journals, internet and the sort. After your announcement regarding my receipt of the Prize, I immediately started receiving numerous congratulatory mails, letters, telephone calls and occasionally some congratulatory gifts from all over the world: USA, Europe, Canada, China, Korea, Taiwan as well as Japan. It has made my life quite busy, but on the other hand, it simply reflects the extremely high respect people pay on the Prize and the name of King Faisal. I have heard from people whom I would hardly expect to hear from. It is awesome.

I consider myself unusually lucky that at this age, I am healthy and active, and can pursue my hobby, namely research, with dedicated first class group members, without disturbance, and helped by intimate friends. On the other hand, I feel a responsibility that I now want to pay back the friendship and honors in a way that will contribute to the well-being of humans and their environment, through various avenues, including my field of research, namely, bioorganic chemistry, as well as other vehicles. I am most grateful to the King Faisal Foundation for this unexpected and inspiring honor. In the past, I may have contributed somewhat by being a founding member of the International Center of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) in Nairobi, Kenya, and serving as one of its directors from 1978 through 1991. Since 2001, I am acting as the first director of the chemistry unit at Biosphere 2 in Arizona operated by Columbia University. It is a huge 3.5 acre glass-domed station with an enclosed rain forest, desert and ocean that is built to mimic

our earth, Biosphere!, and is devoted to the study of our environment, plants, atmosphere, water, plants and insects. The prize I am receiving will certainly without doubt further inspire me to realize my responsibility as a scientist to work for the benefit of our society.