

TODAI SPEECH (March 28, 2006)

Dear Colleagues, Dear Friends,

For it has been one of the greatest pleasures associated with JAMI that people who were at the start only colleagues slowly became friends. We are here all together tonight to celebrate the Seki Kowa Prize awarded to JAMI by the Mathematical Society of Japan; we, the four JAMI representatives, are very pleased at this sign of recognition and Support, and express our great gratitude for the prize.

In the U.S., it is customary on such occasions to give thanks to all people associated with the project and so I begin by thanking first of all the entire Japanese mathematical community for, if it were not such an active, interesting and productive group, there would have been no point and little interest in organizing the JAMI programs. Second, I must mention the important absent people connected with JAMI. I mean the late Professor Kodaira Kunihiro whose contribution will be described below, and Professor Igusa Jun-ichi, who was the Founding Director of JAMI, who set from the beginning the very highest intellectual standards and who guided the first halting steps of the young organization. Professor Igusa, thankfully, is very much alive and quite well, although-regretfully - he decided that his health did not permit such a tiring trip. I have been asked, for the sake of the younger people here tonight who were not present during the first years of JAMI, to give a brief history. But I must also name all the individuals who deserve thanks. If I forget a few, I regret it very much and ask their kind forgiveness.

So, to begin, I became Chairman of the Johns Hopkins Mathematics department in 1985. In the U.S., a chair's term lasts at least 3 years; so, a new chairman has the time, if he wishes, to try to accomplish new things and do more than the routine business of administering the department. At this point, two heroes appeared and I am very glad that they are here tonight to hear me sing their praise. They are, of course, Jack Morava and Steve Wilson who came to me with a brilliant idea. They said: "We have here at Johns Hopkins two excellent Japanese professors, Igusa and Ono. They studied at the best institutions in Japan and are friends with all the best Japanese mathematicians. As a result, our department has had, over the years, a steady stream of wonderful mathematical visitors from Japan. Why not try to systematize this, formalize it into an Institute, and have it become one of the main and continuing activities of our department?" I immediately understood the value of their suggestion. Here was a great project, one of the innovative things that a new chairman could try to accomplish. So we spoke to the department about this and, after

their approval, I spoke to the Dean....and spoke.....and spoke....He was very kind; he agreed that we had a wonderful idea, BUT it needed \$ to realize, and he had no \$. This lasted two years until, finally, I asked for his permission to by-pass him and present the project directly to the President of the Johns Hopkins University, Steven Muller. He agreed. So I made an appointment to see President Muller. I was very nervous; although I was no longer very young, I was not accustomed to dealing with upper administrators of the university. My only suit, dating from my first wedding, was still in good condition, but I was NOT: it was not too small, but I was too big! I purchased a new suit, and a new tie. The tie was a slight problem: in the U.S., business people who try to impress others wear bright red ties, called "power ties". I considered this but thought it was not subtle enough. I chose a yellow tie, the one I am still wearing tonight; yellow is the color of hope and also the color of gold- a much needed commodity! President Muller was not uniformly liked by the faculty, but he had a great quality for our purposes; he very much liked international projects. I presented the JAMI project which had been refined and developed with the help of Morava and Wilson, as well as Igusa and Ono, emphasizing how well it fitted President Muller's ideas on internationalism. To the dismay of his assistants who would have preferred to consider the project at greater length, he said: "You have now awaited an answer for two years. It is time for a decision. How much do you need to begin?" I was, of course, ready with an answer to that question and gave it to him. He tripled it and added a little, saying "You can have \$500,000 for the first three years, but after that, you are on your own: you will have to find the money elsewhere. Agreed?" How can one refuse a half-million \$ falling in one's lap? Ever since, I call my yellow tie the "half-million \$ tie." I rushed back to the department, saw Steve Wilson and tried to explain to him, although I was shaking with excitement, what had just happened. Thus was JAMI born; I did not yet realize it but a great door had just opened, and wonderful things were awaiting inside.

I have perhaps emphasized my own role too much, and for that I apologize. Now the real team effort was necessary, and the wisdom, knowledge and vision of Professors Igusa, Ono, Morava and Wilson were essential. Professor Igusa's choice as Director was almost obvious. The programs of what came to be called Years I, II and III were chosen, focusing on areas where Japan was doing exciting things. An Inaugural Conference featuring a galaxy of mathematical stars from all over the world was organized. Various advisory committees were formed. Professors Hironaka and Reischauer agreed to become Honorary Presidents. We are very grateful to all, both in Japan and the U.S., who consented to help us. These things, although they required a great deal of thought and work, were relatively easy. Soon, however, we were no longer able to avoid the much harder task: what about Years IV, V, VI and later ones? We needed to raise funds on

a major scale. Professor Igusa discussed the problem with his old friend and colleague (who had spent several years at Johns Hopkins before returning to Japan), Professor Kodaira. He agreed to help indirectly for his weak health did not allow him more. Professor Kodaira turned to younger colleagues, Professors Iitaka Shigeru and Ochiai Takushiro, and asked them to help us. They agreed and developed a fundraising plan for JAMI. Igusa and I came to Tokyo and they helped us to visit many business leaders. Professor Shimada Nobuo introduced us to Mr. Toyoda Shoichiro. We received many refusals, of course, but also many generous gifts. The Japanese economic bubble was in healthy condition, business people were in optimistic and generous mood, and we were promising to use the funds only to help Japanese mathematicians visit America. As an “o-mikuji” we purchased at a shrine had told us, “we were walking under a pink cloud and would be successful in our endeavors,” but it had also warned us that we “should be aware of our limitations,” a point Igusa raised whenever I attempted to convince him to do more. After an exhausting two-week stay, and with the help of Iitaka, Ochiai, Shimada and others, we returned to Baltimore with a small treasure which would help JAMI survive an additional year or two. I should also mention that Professor Hironaka had kindly opened an account in his Foundation, JAMS, for JAMI, so that Japanese donations could flow through it on a tax-exempt basis, which was a powerful help.

Time is passing, and I must skip details, but I want to thank the many people who helped during numerous trips to Japan since then. Foremost among them, Professor Iitaka who was a very kind host at Gakushuin University, Professors Morita, Noguchi and Ishii at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, Professor Nishida at Kyoto University, Professor Nishikawa at Tohoku University, and again Professor Shimada who accompanied me on a second visit to Toyota Motors, although his health was not very good. Also Professors Iitaka and Shimizu Yuji who generously made contributions of their own funds.

To all these people, who had accepted the spirit of JAMI, I and other members of our department owe a tremendous debt for helping us to build, in the words of Nitobe Inazio, a bridge across the Pacific, for the mathematical communities.

It is also customary, in the U.S., to make some jokes in such a speech, and I have been too serious, so please let me tell a funny but true story. When my term as Department Chairman ended, Igusa wanted me to continue helping him and thought that I needed an official title for this, so he asked me to be Vice-Director of JAMI. I agreed and so we needed to prepare a new “meishi” (visiting card) for the new title. The English side was easy; The Japanese not so easy. With the help of a Japanese person, we wrote it but he said he was not

sure of some characters and to please have it checked. When I asked a Japanese student to proofread it, he burst out laughing: “You are not Vice-Director, you are the Happy Director!” for the word FUKU can be written in at least two Kanji, one of which means “Assistant” and the other means “Happy”, and the wrong character had been chosen. So the correction was made and I became again Vice-Director. Now, of course, I have retired and no longer have official titles: I am not director, I am not vice-director, but, with the help of the MSJ and its Seki Kowa Prize, I am very much the “Happy Director emeritus” of JAMI.

When I retired a few years ago, I wrote to all Japanese mathematicians who had been active in JAMI, a long letter of thanks and farewell, my “first swansong.” I am very pleased and grateful that the MSJ has enabled me to give this “second swansong.”

And now we face the future. It is in your hands, both American and Japanese. I look forward to much further success.

Jean-Pierre Meyer