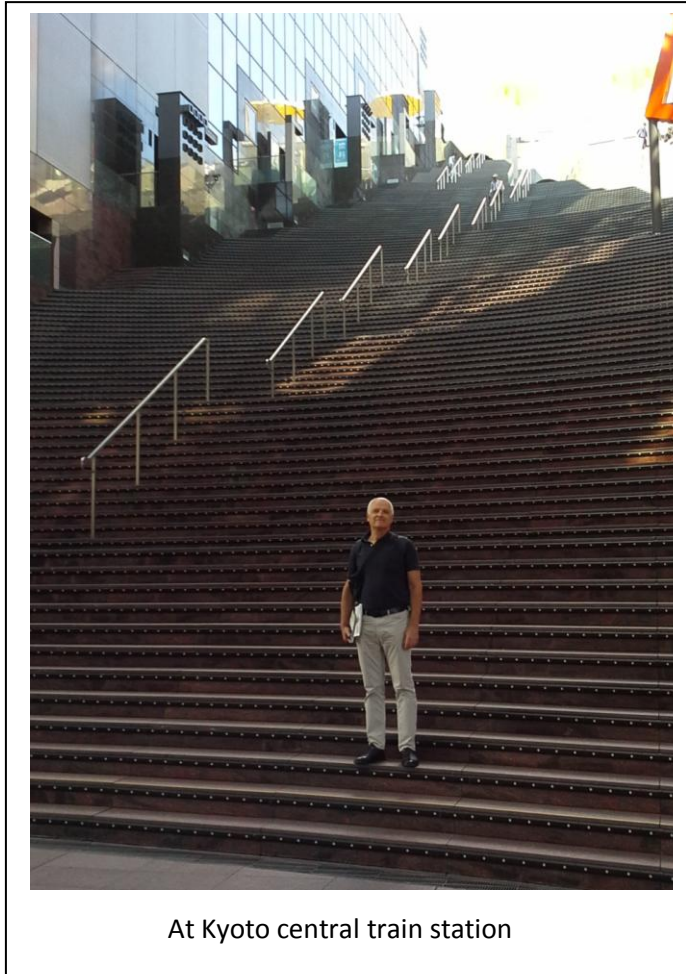


At a first glance, JSPS award of one month stay in Japan was a risky adventure. With all my commitments in Imperial College, in the middle of several running projects, scientific articles in preparation, a big grant writing, summer students, – to drop everything and leave my group for a



At Kyoto central train station

month for a completely new and unfamiliar environment, was a challenging act. The idea came to my mind, when our faculty strategic officer e-mailed us the information about JSPS programmes. Although I knew several groups in Japan whom it would have been good to visit, I was attracted by an idea to centre the visit on one of my research areas, namely, DNA biophysics. I knew two internationally renowned groups in Japan, whom I always wanted to collaborate with: predominantly theoretical group of Professor Kenichi Yoshikawa of Kyoto University, who recently moved to Doshisha University (Kyotonabe) and an experimental one of Prof. Takashi Ohyama at Waseda University (Tokyo). I knew both of them from their outstanding published works. Being theoretician myself I addressed Professor Yoshikawa, to discuss the idea. He shared my enthusiasm,

nominated me to JSPS, and soon we learned that his nomination was successful. There was no way for a U-turn!

I have chosen to settle at the Guest House of Doshisha University at Tatara Campus: a very comfortable establishment, but...in the middle of nowhere, however in a walking distance from Doshisha. Doshisha itself is excellently maintained, rich private University, to a high degree research oriented, perhaps not as much as Kyoto, but still a superb place to work. I was warned by my host that Tatara is not a good base for sightseeing, but I did not make that long way from London for sightseeing. I came to explore what we should and could do together. My wife who stayed with me for the first two weeks did most of the sightseeing for me (I joined her twice on two weekends). Actually for reaching old historic town of Nara, Tatara was a convenient location. Kyoto was neither a big problem to get to, although had we stayed there, I would have to spend quite a lot of time on daily commuting.

Apart from staying in the Yoshikawa's lab at Doshisha, and interacting with him and his students, I gave a number of seminars and lectures - at the annual meeting of the Physical Society of Japan in Nagoya, in Tokyo (at Waseda), in Kyoto (at a special symposium on hierarchical dynamics of DNA, organized by the Head of the London Office, Professor Kunio Takeyasu, who keeps his Professorship and continue running his research group in Kyoto University), in the Engineering Campus of Kyoto

University at Physical Chemistry seminar of Prof. Sakka, and at the retreat student symposium of Yoshikawa's lab.

I have met also two younger progressing researches: Associate Professor Yanao (Waseda) and Assistant Professor Motoboyashi (Hokkaido University), who came especially to see me at Doshisha and discuss a possibility of joint projects. I also met my old friend Takashi Kakiuchi, formerly Professor at Kyoto University, now Professor Emeritus. We discussed with him a number of classical problems of electrochemistry, where there are still a lot of things to do. This took place on one of the Sundays, while he was showing me old Kyoto, from one temple or shrine to another, from one tea house to another. A memorable walk.

As a result of all these activities, we have worked out outlines of five big research projects –four in DNA biophysics, and one in the area of ionic liquids at electrified interfaces. Which ones? The details are not what I am going to disclose now: they are challenging, hot, and competitive, and Shinto Gods should bless us that our plans will not be left on paper, but realised and in the very near future. We worked out practicalities of cooperation, including the possibilities of further exchange visits including junior staff.

My general impressions of my one month stay in Japan are overwhelming. My wife and I made many friends there. Fantastic hospitality and warmth, wherever we were, care, and perfect devoted work of anyone we dealt with – in bars, taxis, public transportation; Japan is a country of perfectionism. There is a back side of the perfectionist medal: many young Japanese including undergraduate and graduate students are shy to speak English, because they are not happy to speak imperfectly. This impedes communication, but it should not be me to complain, who did not have time to learn any Japanese before his departure to Japan! The nature is beautiful, of course where there is nature, mainly in the mountain regions. Old parts of Kyoto and Nara are amazingly spiritual, and you feel it, despite the crowd of tourists around. And the cuisine is something exceptional, a great contribution to human culture. But, believe me, this is not the only reason why I would love one day to come back! I hope this was a beginning of a beautiful cooperation. Time will tell.