



Living in Okazaki and IMS

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It has already been four years since I started working in the group of Prof. Hiromi Okamoto at IMS in 2019. When I was a PhD student at Seoul National University in Korea, I was dedicated to the development of new nanomaterials, specifically conducting a research on the chemical synthesis of chiral nanoparticle. At that time, I was deeply engrossed in the dilemma of how to analyze and utilize our newly discovered nanomaterials, along with my advisor and colleagues. However, there were few researchers in Korea who studied the chirality of materials. In the midst of this, I had the opportunity to become acquainted with Prof. Okamoto, an expert in this field, in 2017, and I had several chances to visit IMS for collaborative researches. By visiting the laboratory of Prof. Okamoto, I was able to broaden my knowledge by conducting nearfield optical experiments that I had never experienced before. At the same time, I was strongly drawn to the excellent research environment at IMS, which included state-of-the-art equipment, great researchers, and a conducive atmosphere to research. As I returned to Seoul and finalize my doctoral thesis, I was very happy to obtain the opportunity to apply to Prof. Okamoto's group as a research assistant professor. I believed it was a great direction to expand my research experience and improve myself. Therefore, I applied for the position and eventually joined the laboratory.

Upon arriving at IMS, my research focused on the measurement and interpretation of non-linear chiral optical phenomena in nanostructures. As a material scientist, I was not familiar with this type of optical experiment. However, Prof. Okamoto took the times to discuss ongo-

ing researches with me despite his very busy schedule, and I was able to conduct my research smoothly thanks to my lab colleagues who helped me with their extensive knowledge and experimental experience. Not only research, but also visa issues and various administrative issues, Prof. Okamoto, secretary Nomura-san, and recently appointed secretary Ito-san provided full support, which was of great help for me. Their advice on various aspects of life in Japan helped me navigate through any difficulties that arose. Research discussions, small talks, and occasional lunch or dinner together at nearby restaurants with members of the group often refreshed the monotonous routine. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to return to Korea for two years and faced a slump, but I was able to recover thanks to the kindness and encouragement of the people in the group. I would like to express my deep gratitude for them.

Near the faculty house where I live, there are large shopping malls and parks, making it a pleasant place to spend time on weekends. Traveling outside of Okazaki was not easy due to COVID-19, but I enjoyed exploring the city of Okazaki on foot or by bicycle. There are places to enjoy walks such as Minami Park to the south, Okazaki Castle and the Otogawa River to the north. The IMS campus also boasts a splendid landscape, with each season—spring, summer, autumn, and winter—offering a unique view. Sometimes, when I feel the need to refresh myself with some fresh air, I take a walk around the campus and its surroundings. I believe that the time spent at IMS not only contributes to the advancement of my research career but provides valuable moments of tranquility for my mind.

My Okazaki Adventure: Connecting People Through Research

Rosie Graham (Specially Appointed Research Fellow)

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It all started in January 2023, when I had the pleasure of joining the Institute for Molecular Science in Okazaki as a specially appointed research fellow. In order to facilitate collaborative research between IMS and Princeton University in the USA, similar to my PhD program at Portsmouth University in the UK joint with the National Renewable Laboratories in Colorado, USA, I am passionate about bringing people together through research, and this was the perfect opportunity to do so.

Now, let me tell you about Okazaki. This charming city may be small, but it packs a punch! It seamlessly blends traditional and modern Japan, and I fell in love with it immediately. I have so many wonderful memories that I will always cherish. I remember spending afternoons under the cherry blossom trees, watching the petals fall like snow over the river Otogawa. The traditional temples and breathtaking castle were a sight to behold, and I loved exploring the markets and festivals that were held frequently in the green spaces around town. And let's not forget the amazing restaurants – I could go on and on about the delicious food I had there!

But Okazaki wasn't just a great place to live – it was also a great place to explore. I could easily access larger cities like Nagoya via Japan's well-connected public transport system. And there were so many fun things to do in Aichi prefecture! One of my favorite adventures was going to Tokoname to walk the historical pottery path filled with various lucky cats (Maneki neko). It was such a unique and memorable experience.

Of course, my time at the Institute for Molecular Science was the real highlight of my trip. The IMS conducts cutting-edge research in molecular science, and I had the pleasure of being part of the life and coordination-complex department. I investigated the elementary step mechanism

of engineered Kinesins, and it

was fascinating work. But what made it truly special was the incredible hospitality of Prof. Iino and my colleagues. They made me feel so welcome and at home, and I learned so much from them.

I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Ryota Iino's Molecular Machine Designing Lab. His thorough approach to consistency and reproducibility inspired all of us to perform our best and produce exciting results and novel ideas. And I can't forget to thank my colleagues, administration support staff, and friends at IMS. Specifically, Prof. Iino, Assist. Prof. Otomo, Assist. Prof. Harashima and Dr. Matsumoto were always there for support, discussions, and parties! I hope to continue working with them in the future beyond this position.

A special event at IMS was when the Rotary Club in Okazaki hosted a BBQ for foreign researchers in collaboration with the Okazaki three institutes. It was an annual event that had been going on for decades, and it was a great opportunity to meet other researchers and connect with the people of Okazaki. I had so much fun, and I think more events like that would be a valuable endeavor for all at IMS. My favorite memory of Okazaki was during the Wisteria festival with my partner, I enjoyed sharing the wonders of Okazaki riverside.

All in all, my experience in Japan was integral to my self-development as a researcher. I would highly recommend the Institute for Molecular Science in Okazaki to any foreign researcher looking to work in Japan. The people are welcoming, the research is cutting-edge, and the city is simply charming. I hope to return someday and experience Japan in the autumn season – I can only imagine how beautiful it must be!