



Speech of the President of the Max Planck Society

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At the Occasion of Celebrating 40 Years of Cooperation with RIKEN in Japan

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– Check against delivery –

I went to school in the southwest of Germany, in a small town called Bietigheim. And believe it or not: in this little town there is a beautiful *Japanese Garden*. A park with ponds, bridges, lanterns, acorn trees and even objects with Japanese inscriptions. Why does a tiny German town have a Japanese garden?

Well, the physician *Erwin von Bälz* was born in Bietigheim in 1849. He moved to Japan, got married and lived there for 30 years. And: he became the personal physician of the *Japanese Emperor*. Erwin von Bälz was a key person to bring Western medicine to Japan. And in return, he brought Japanese culture to Germany: art, writing, and sports, in particular Judo.

With this, a very warm welcome to all of you! Thank you for joining us tonight. I am particularly grateful to you, dear Ambassador von Goetze, that you are hosting us here at this beautiful embassy.

Dear president Gonokami, dear colleagues,

What a day we were having! Many thanks indeed for hosting us at RIKEN. It was fascinating to talk to the scientists working on the Advanced Intelligence Project.

We have also seen the laboratories of Hidetoshi Katori's group, who is coordinating the Max Planck-RIKEN-PTB Center entitled "Time, Constants and Fundamental Symmetries". I am also grateful to my colleague Klaus Blaum for joining. He is coordinating this flagship project on our side.

This shared research center is just one of many highly successful cooperation projects that we launched between RIKEN and the Max Planck Society over the last four decades. And today, we celebrate *40 years of our cooperation!*



Looking back, we had actually been connected for over a century. Both RIKEN and our predecessor organization, the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft, were founded early in the 20th century. And from the beginning, both research organizations focused on excellence, on basic research, and on attracting the best people.

And 40 years back, in 1984, presidents Miyajima and Lüst signed a cooperation agreement with the aim to *advance science for the benefit of society*. There is continuity until today, despite many changes in leadership. In October 1992, president Staab advised his successor to continue the collaboration. He pointed out there are outstanding scientists and excellent facilities at RIKEN. And my predecessors Peter Gruss and Martin Stratmann were both visiting RIKEN.

So, here we are, 40 years later. *Did we live up to our goals?* The answer is yes, and there are numbers. In the years 2018-2022, we published 707 joint papers, mainly in particle physics, astrophysics and materials science. Last year, Max Planck Institutes hosted 136 scientists from Japan and over 100 cooperation projects are ongoing. Of these, about 2/3 are in physics and chemistry, but there are also projects in the life sciences, the social sciences and in economics.

Although RIKEN is our long-standing partner, we also have other collaborators here in Japan. For example, in 2019 we established a mobility program for young researchers with the University of Tokyo. With them, we also maintain a Research Center for Quantum Materials that includes the University of British Columbia.

For sure, Japan is an important partner for us. It is not only because we can build on past successes. No, it is also because we can envision a shared future. In this respect, we are very happy to see that the current Japanese *government* is making efforts to strengthen research and international cooperation. It wishes to support PhD research, and the new "10 Billion Yen Fund" is certainly welcome. We have several representatives here – thank you for your support of science!

Clearly, we should not slow down in our collaboration, especially facing the many societal challenges *within* our countries. Indeed, we share many challenges, just take the rapid rise of artificial intelligence applications, the demographic development of our societies or the green transformation of our economies.

Can we as scientists envision possible future opportunities for outstanding research collaborations, may they address these challenges or not? First, I think we should take established collaborations to the next level when we see a *future potential*. Second, we should optimally *train the next generation*. Maybe we can consider more possibilities for short-term exchange. And third, we should explore *new fields* whenever we have strengths and can spot synergies.



Let me however add a *word of caution* here. I think we should not simply follow the well-known *megatrends*, because this holds the danger of producing mainstream results. If we wish to really make a difference, we have to think outside the box, take on risks and follow big ideas. This requires *curiosity, courage, and perseverance*. But our reward will be transformative results that are likely to also lead to innovations.

Therefore, the choice of new fields should largely be up to the collaborating scientists. Nevertheless, some obvious fields include sustainability, technologies for climate mitigation, or the life sciences. For example, I know that our vice president, Christian Doeller, has been interacting with neuroscientists here today. Also, marine biology may be such a new area. The marine biologist Masakazu Hoshino is currently establishing the first Max Planck Partner Group in Japan at Kobe University.

Really, I believe – no, from my own experience I actually *know* – that new ideas often arise from discussions with colleagues who have a different *perspective*. And this is why occasions such as the one tonight are special. They can be the beginning of something new, exciting, and big.

This brings me back to the beginning of my speech, because Erwin von Bälz and the Japanese people who interacted with him in the 19th century also took the courage to change perspective. And both sides were rewarded with new knowledge and insights. Such a *mutually rewarding experience* is the true nature of scientific exchange. We just have to make sure that we *never stop asking questions*.

Tonight, I am looking forward to the next decade of fruitful collaborations with RIKEN and with other institutions here in Japan. It is a pleasure to learn from you, to discuss with you, and to celebrate with you tonight. Thank you and please enjoy the evening.