

In the year 2006 I arrived in Japan to pursue studies in Thermodynamics – a long-standing favorite subject of mine. Naturally, the place to come was the Research Center for Structural Thermodynamics (then called Research Center for Molecular Thermodynamics) at Osaka University. There I was to obtain my Master's in Chemistry under supervision of Professor Akira Inaba at the beginning of 2009. In between my arrival in Osaka and my return to Colombia, I lived a challenging and unforgettable experience that I would like to share in this letter.

I entered the Center proper by Fall 2006, after a period of intensive study of the Japanese language elsewhere at Osaka University. At that moment, my priority as a budding experimentalist was to understand practical calorimetry – the backbone of the Center's research. For a start, a lab mate, Hal Suzuki, and I, were given way to operate and try to bring back to use the Center's "General Purpose Calorimeter"; a machine of fine history producing quality data but already well past of its heyday. The General Purpose Calorimeter was a complex piece of equipment and that assignment was never meant to be easy, but it proved harder than we expected: after a few months struggling with hardly any success, we had to give up all hope of retooling the calorimeter. Back then, it certainly looked like a failure and for us it was a hard bite to swallow, but now I realize that experience was very positive because thanks to it I learnt a lot about the inner works of an adiabatic calorimeter and, equally important, the life of an experimentalist.

Sometime later, I would move on to work on the low temperature behavior of the glycerol/water binary system; a topic that became the core of my Master's research project. The exploration of this system took me to doing experiments in different calorimeters in the following months, including a Quantum Design Physical Property Measurement System. Our main results for the system, however, were obtained during winter 2007 – 2008 using the Center's "TM-CAL" adiabatic calorimeter. Working together with Professor Inaba, we measured a significant heat capacity difference between ordinary ice and a novel structure of ice that crystallizes out of glycerol/water solutions. These measurements are the subject of a paper we prepared and submitted to a journal, currently being reviewed for publication. With the benefit of hindsight, I now see that that winter was the most fruitful time for me at the Center. It was so partly because we were successful in terms of experimental results, but what I now cherish the most are the exciting waits for the latest results, the planning for the next run, etc., in other words, the feeling of science in the making I had every time we discussed experiments with Professor Inaba.

Life at the Center was not only science, though. An occasion for celebration was never wasted. The coming of new students or a visiting Professor, a successful conference or the end of the year were all reason enough for us to throw a party with cooking, chatting and a few drinks included. Some of the

readers of this letter may well remember Toshikazu Maruoka or Kazumasa Shimada, two of my lab mates at the time, busily preparing food to get the party ready. National Calorimetry Conferences, apart from being major academic events in our calendar, were also occasions we profited from to relax in the form of visiting. The 2007 Sapporo Calorimetry Conference is a good example of that. Academic activities started on Monday but we arrived in advance on Sunday to do some sightseeing. We rented a van near the airport and went to Shikotsu-Toya National Park, home to a beautiful lake surrounded by a cedar forest, and later visited the port-city of Otaru to enjoy its famous sea food. Back in Sapporo, that evening we shared a great meal and braced ourselves for the presentations we had the next few days. Our presentations went fine so in every respect the 2007 Calorimetry Conference was a success for our Center.

My time in Japan was also a very important personal experience. It was the realization of a childhood dream – to know this fascinating culture; and of a professional one – to do research in thermodynamics. While in Osaka I also had the opportunity to meet and share with many people from Japan and other countries. That experience challenged the previous view I had of the world and helped me grow in understanding and tolerance of the other. That, above anything else, I hold as the most important lesson I learnt during my time in Japan.

There are many more memories I would like to remember here, but space is limited. What I cannot fail to do, however, is to express my gratitude to the many people and institutions that made of my time in Japan a defining experience in my life. First and foremost, I would like to thank Professor Akira Inaba for his teachings and unfailing support. I would also like to thank the Center's staff, Professors Nagano, Miyazaki, Nakazawa and Takajo; and secretaries Hosokawa and Kanbayashi –san. My gratitude goes too to my lab mates at the time, Maruoka, Arai, Shimada and Suzuki –san, as well as to visiting Professors Xiaozheng Lan, Christoph Meingast, Piotr Zielinski, Jan Krawczyk, Qi Wang and Yoshikata Koga who helped me in numerous occasions and made of the Center a familiar place. Finally, I would like to thank the Japanese Ministry of Education for the financial support of my studies.

Good bye friends! I hope to meet you all again.

Sincerely yours,

Oscar Dario Camacho Palacios

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