

Title	Listening to what associate professor Citterio, Daniel says : Japan is complete with an excellent research-encouraging environment
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Japan is complete with an excellent research-encouraging environment

Mr. Citterio is devoted to the development of handy paper-based sensors that anyone, not only specialists, can handle with ease. Eight years have passed since Mr. Citterio, born in Zurich, Switzerland, came to Japan to engage in research work. He praises Japan as an attractively fertile soil for research pursuits thanks to strong bonds among researchers as well as an excellent research environment relatively favored with both ample budgets and advanced facilities.

When did you come to Japan?

My first visit to Japan was in 1996 when I was a doctor course student at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETHZ). At that time I had an opportunity to participate in a joint project and belonged to the Chemical and Biosensor Laboratory at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Science, staying for three months.

With universities in Europe, students in natural sciences usually find employment after completing a doctor's course and then pursuing postdoctoral studies overseas for at least one year. Many of my fellow students liked to study in the United States, but I didn't want to go there. This was because, rather than for the sake of research only, I also wanted to broaden my horizons in life. In other words, I wanted to take up new challenges in a land where culture and language are

totally different. So I made up my mind to study as a postdoctoral fellow in Japan, the destination I had visited as a doctor course student.

To tell the truth, during my first visit to Japan I had an opportunity to visit Keio University for only one day. On that occasion I paid a visit to Professor Suzuki's lab, to which I belong now. I learned that Professor Suzuki's lab is engaged in research close to that of mine. Finding that students there were all open-minded and easy to communicate with, I had a good impression of Keio.

It was in March 1998 that I revisited Japan as a postdoctoral fellow of Keio University. My initial plan was to stay for one year. But as I got accustomed to my research life in Japan, I began to think it would be a waste of precious opportunity if I left Japan as initially planned. Our lab's atmosphere was so comfortable that I postponed my return again and again. As a result, I had stayed in Japan for four and a half years in total.

Did you acquire your Japanese language ability in those days?

Yes. In my early years I could hardly speak Japanese, which put me in trouble even for shopping and other daily matters. But my Japanese gradually improved thanks to once-a-week Japanese lessons from a private teacher and daily communication with students on the campus.

Later, in 2002, I returned to Switzerland and began to work as an assistant professor at a university. Meanwhile, I became interested in patents by that time because our Keio lab had obtained several patents. So I acquired a patent attorney qualification by entering a university again to study.

Armed with these careers, I once found employment with a Swiss chemical

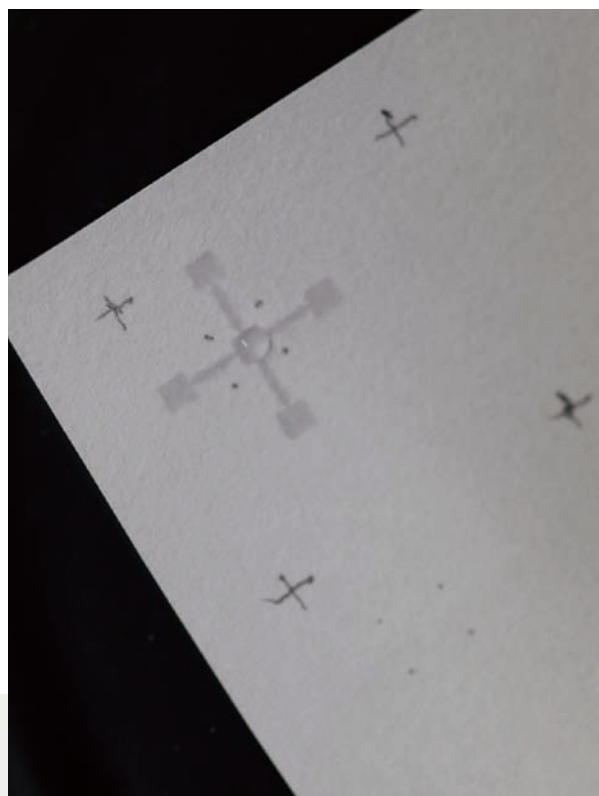
maker, but left this company a year later and returned to Japan.

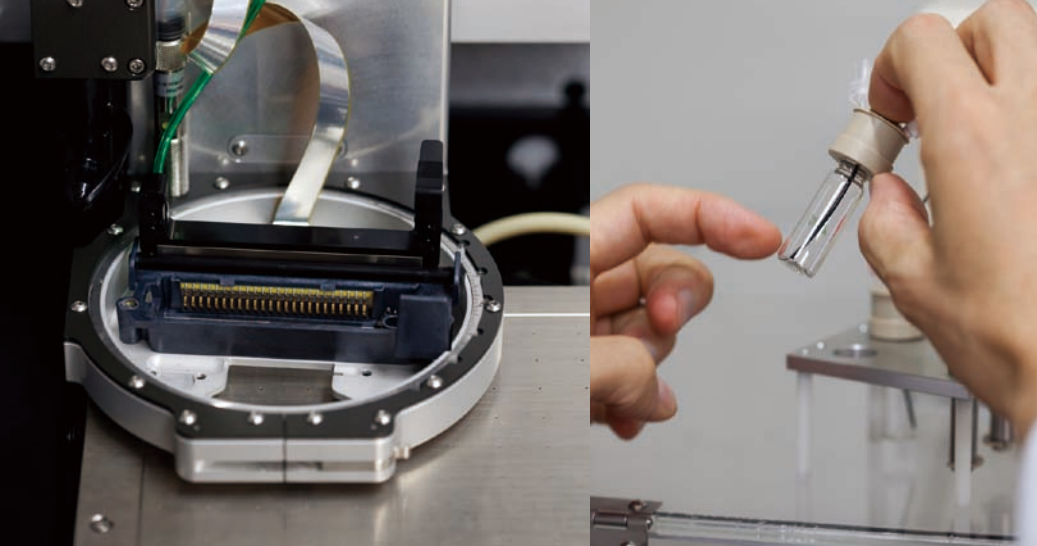
Why?

I had long enjoyed a life steeped in unrestricted research activities, conducting experiments at university labs and writing theses. But the moment I joined the company, such lifestyle was lost, which caused me to entertain anxiety about my future. I thought I was a researcher type after all.

In the meantime, Professor Suzuki was kind enough to invite me to participate in a new project. I thus came back to Keio University's Faculty of Science and Technology in 2006 as a non-tenured associate professor. From the academic year 2009, I became a full-time associate professor.

From 2007 on I focused on research into paper-based chips using the inkjet printer. I think Keio is complete with a





superb environment for researchers.

You mean it's a favorable environment for researchers?

When we propose a research project and it is accepted, the university offers an adequate support environment and we can proceed with the project almost unrestrictedly. This is a great merit.

Things seem to be changing a bit these days. Even so, I think Japan still offers an environment in which research budgets are available relatively easily. I also notice strong bonds existing among researchers like Professor Suzuki. They all value mutual human connections, which is good. For example, even when you want to know about something that is outside of your own specialty field, you can consult a specialist of that particular field through a network – a great environment.

By the way, is your name Italian?

Yes. This is because my ancestors immigrated from the northern part of Italy to Switzerland. My father was born in Switzerland while my mother had two nationalities: German and Swiss. My mother tongue is German.

Citterio, Daniel

By creating and combining functional materials (dyes, polymers, etc.), his research work focuses on the development of (bio) chemical sensors for application in industrial, medical, and environmental analysis. Born in Zurich, Switzerland, he graduated from the Department of Chemistry of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETHZ) in 1992 and obtained his Doctor degree from the same school in 1998. After postdoctoral research at Keio University, he became a research associate at ETHZ. Through postgraduate studies, he obtained a Masters degree in Intellectual Property and joined a Swiss chemical manufacturer as a patent attorney. In 2006, he returned to Keio University, where he became a tenured Associate Professor at the Department of Applied Chemistry in 2009.

Incidentally, as a small boy I was not particularly interested in becoming a scientist. Rather, I wanted to become a pilot but gave up the dream because of weak eyesight. Somehow I was good at foreign languages (English, French, Italian and Latin) at school, which made my teacher recommend me to major in foreign languages in the future. Though I undoubtedly liked foreign language study, I didn't think I would choose foreign language study itself as my profession.

What I am today as a researcher may partially be the influence of a high school chemistry teacher who lived in a neighboring condominium. I still remember him telling me many things about chemistry while giving me a ride to school. At one time I was absorbed in a chemical experiment kit for junior high school students. Due to failure of an experiment one day, I discolored

the wallpaper of my room into brown. (laughter)

You like to use your own hands to create something, don't you?

Yes, I do. In fact, I'm also good at cooking. In a way cooking is similar to chemical experiments, you know. In Japan I've been living in the Hiyoshi area. Living a single-life, when I have time I often invite friends or some of my students and treat them to dishes of my own cooking.

Since I like to move not only my hands but also the whole body, I often enjoy outdoors on days off – activities like cycling, skiing and hiking. I was surprised to find few young Japanese people taking up hiking as outdoor recreation. Given superb scenic attractions in Japan, I'd like more and more students to enjoy what nature has to offer. I recover vitality needed for research work through such outdoor leisure activities.

◎ Just a word from . . . ◎

● A student: Daniel-san is frank and easy to communicate with. All of us follow him like one of our seniors. Not only does he allow whatever we like to challenge, but also he is always willing to give advice. He is a truly reliable teacher.

(Reporter & text writer: Madoka Tainaka)

For the full text of this interview, please refer to:

<http://www.st.keio.ac.jp/kyurizukai>

“I love conducting experiments and writing theses in my lab ... I found myself suited to be a researcher.”

