

In Memoriam:*In Memory of Dr. Akihiko Maekawa, Honorary Member**My memories of Dr. Maekawa*

On October 18, 2024, Dr. Akihiko Maekawa passed away at the age of 85. Please accept our deepest condolences to his family and friends.

As you know, Dr. Maekawa made tremendous efforts not only in research but also in the education and training of young researchers, nurturing many pupils who later excelled in the field.

After graduating from the Graduate School of Medicine at Nagoya City University in 1968, he worked as an assistant professor in the Department of Second Pathology at Nagoya City University. Two years later, in 1970, he crossed the Hakone Mountains to Setagaya where he became the head of the newly established Office of Chemical Pathology at the National Institute of Hygienic Sciences (now the National Institute of Health Sciences).

Dr. Maekawa was born in Hiroshima and attended university in Nagoya.

Although he was from the Kansai region, I have no recollection of him ever speaking in a Kansai dialect. However, he always liked to say, "Fishes from the Seto Inland Sea are the best!"

The first director of the Chemical Pathology Department was Dr. Sigeyoshi Odashima. The office was initially run by just two members, Dr. Akihiko Maekawa and Dr. Motoi Ishidate. This department was established as part of the historic National Institute of Health Sciences 100th-anniversary celebrations in 1974, a time filled with new challenges and vitality.

Later, Director Dr. Ishidate became head of the Mutagenicity Department, which was newly established when the Biological Safety Research Center opened in 1978. At that time, the Chemical Pathology Department was renamed the Pathology Department. Under Director Dr. Odashima's leadership, Dr. Akihiko Maekawa alongside Dr. Michihito Takahashi and Dr. Yuji Kurokawa, served as heads of the offices.

I recall a humorous incident: one day, a visitor mistakenly greeted Dr. Maekawa as the department director. Dr. Odashima, the actual director, watched quietly, puffing his pipe with a smile. Dr. Maekawa, however, was reportedly very embarrassed!

I also remember the times I sat with Dr. Maekawa at a discussion microscope. Sometimes, I felt dizzy due to the vibrations caused by his shaking legs. He would tease me, saying, "You're a heavy drinker, but you get drunk easily with microscopy, don't you?". Also, if I gave an irrelevant answer, he would exclaim, "Eh?! What?" and tap several times with his pointing stick.

Tragically, in 1980, Director Dr. Odashima collapsed in a parking lot near the then-Ministry of Health and Welfare and passed away suddenly at the age of 52. This was a profound loss for both the department and Japan as a whole. As one of the most experienced members of the department, Dr. Maekawa must have endured tremendous hardship during this time. Several years later, Dr. Takahashi was appointed director of the Pathology Department, and Dr. Kurokawa became director of the Toxicology Department. In 1990, Dr. Maekawa left the National Institute of Hygienic Sciences and joined the Sasaki Research Institute as director of the Pathology Department. In 2001, he was appointed the seventh director of the Sasaki Research Institute.

December, 2024

Honorary Member of the JSTP, National Institute of Health Sciences

Hiroshi Onodera

Memories of Dr. Maekawa

I would like to express my deep sadness at the passing of Dr. Akihiko Maekawa, and pray for his peaceful repose. When I heard the news of Dr. Maekawa's death, I felt a profound sense of loss and pain. Many people, including myself, were guided by Dr. Maekawa in both public and private life, and I extend my deepest sympathies to all of you.

Dr. Maekawa was a pioneer in the field of toxicologic pathology, focusing his research on the carcinogenesis of female reproductive organs, and he dedicated much of his life to mentoring younger researchers. Many of his students have gone on to play leading roles in the field. It is no exaggeration to say that his mentorship has influenced nearly every corner of toxicologic pathology today.

In 1998, he chaired the 14th Annual Meeting of the Japanese Society of Toxicologic Pathology at the Tokyo International Forum, still a first-class international convention center—impressive feat considering the Forum had only opened a year earlier. From 2001 to 2004, Dr. Maekawa also served as the Society's third president making invaluable contribution to its modernization and growth.

Beyond his research, Dr. Maekawa was deeply involved in administering risk assessment and managing chemical substances. He was a vital member of various councils and study groups of the relevant ministries and agencies. I still vividly remember his office piled high with papers—back when materials were printed and sent in physical form, unlike today.

Dr. Maekawa devoted himself to nurturing the next generation of toxicologic pathology researchers within and beyond the National Institute of Health Sciences. After moving to the Sasaki Institute, Sasaki Foundation, he accepted many research students and organized formal and informal study groups. His guidance was always strict, and tension in these sessions was palpable. Yet his mentorship was also profoundly impactful, and his students took his advice to heart.

Even after the Department of Pathology at the Sasaki Institute closed in 2006, the study group he founded continued to meet regularly and became known as “Maekawa Seminar” after Dr. Maekawa stepped down. I believe Dr. Maekawa would have been very proud and happy to see his legacy continue. It is very presumptuous of me to say this. Still, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to everyone involved and hope they will continue nurturing future generations in his name.

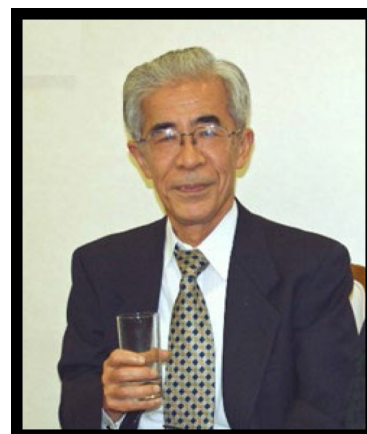
Finally, I would like to share a few personal memories. I had the opportunity to meet Dr. Maekawa at conferences and research meetings during my younger years. In 2002, I was transferred to the Sasaki Institute as head of the Department of Pathology, where Dr. Maekawa, the institute's director, became my direct supervisor. Having admired him as a great teacher, I found receiving his guidance firsthand a profoundly humbling and inspiring experience. His support and mentorship during that time are something I will always treasure.

Dr. Maekawa loved to drink, and we occasionally went out together. My wife and I had the pleasure of dining with him and his wife. I can still picture him enjoying himself at the study sessions and social gatherings after events, mingling with his young students, who had earlier been so earnest in receiving his instruction. He was a very strong drinker, and I am sure he is enjoying a good drink in heaven.

One of Dr. Maekawa's favorite sayings was, “I'm a doctor who treats dead people”. While it was said in a self-mocking tone, it also reflected his deep pride in his work as a pathologist, even though he was a well-known figure in the fields of toxicologic pathology and experimental pathology. To me, it also reminded us of the importance of our fundamental roles as physicians and researchers—something he was always teaching us not to forget.

In this commemorative essay, I followed Dr. Hiroshi Onodera's suggestions to share personal memories rather than a more formal or “hard” writing style. I hope Dr. Maekawa will forgive me for taking this approach and that he will be pleased with this “soft” remembrance.

Dr. Maekawa's achievements in toxicologic pathology and his contributions to the administration of risk assessment and management of chemical substances were immense. His passing is a significant loss to these fields. On behalf of everyone who had the honor of learning from and working with him, I express my deepest gratitude for his guidance and mentorship. His achievements and spirits will live on in the heart of researchers in toxicologic pathology and in the work of those in industry, government, and academia who strive to ensure the safe use of chemical substances.



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Honorary Member of the JSTP, Teikyo Heisei University Faculty of Health Care and Medical Sports

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