

Personal recollections of Koichi Okamoto

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It was the last week of November 1975. I had joined the IAEA Nuclear Data Section (NDS) three days ago, and I was told that a senior colleague, Koichi Okamoto, invited everyone from the Section to a party in his house on Friday night. I was a little shy and did not show up.

As it turned out, what I missed was the first in a series of legendary events. For more than 10 years, always towards the end of November, there was the famous *Koichi's Party*. All NDS members with their partners and some more IAEA friends, altogether perhaps 40 or so people, gathered in Koichi's home; there was excellent food, prepared by Koichi's wife Sanae; there was a piano, and the NDS Section Head J.J. (Joe) Schmidt, and some other amateur musicians of NDS, played background music later in the evening; and there was the evening's highlight: a window to the kitchen opened, and in it Koichi appeared, wearing a chef's hat and a bright smile, offering everyone a portion of king-size shrimps, imported and prepared by Koichi himself.

This is one of many remarkable memories I have of Koichi. I had the privilege of working with him at NDS for 15 years, often under his guidance, and I consider him one of my main mentors in the early stages of my career. To me, Koichi could be seen as a role model for a scientist at IAEA. He worked tirelessly, often long hours; and, even more importantly, he did the work for this international organisation with the same dedication and enthusiasm as many other scientists might have only for their personal research goals.

Koichi was convinced of the important role of the IAEA in international cooperation. As far as I know, he was among the first IAEA scientists to go on a duty trip to China before this country joined the IAEA. Later, the China Nuclear Data Center became a member of the NDS-coordinated network of nuclear data centers.

Koichi spent a major part of his life abroad. To raise a family with three children under such conditions, including moving between countries, must have been a challenge for all family members. On the other hand, when children graduate from the French *Lycée* in Vienna, speaking both French and German fluently, this is an advantage for life which can hardly be overestimated.

An area of special interest for Koichi was castles. During his stay in Austria, he visited more than 100 (perhaps several hundred) castles, including minor ones, of which many are not so well known even among Austrians, and collected informations on them. Koichi was for many years a member of the *Österreichische Burgenverein*, an association of owners and friends of castles, and he was accepted as an expert in their field. Along with this went his interest in medieval culture, one of his preferred subjects of conversation outside professional topics.

Another important topic was good food and good wine. Koichi introduced his NDS colleagues to sources of good Asian food in Vienna (in those years, there was, according to him, no genuine Japanese restaurant in this city). He enjoyed (in small quantities) Austrian white wine, and on several occasions we went together on wine-tasting excursions to wine-growers in Lower Austria, to taste (and buy some bottles of) *Grüner Veltliner*, *Weissburgunder* and other typical local wines.

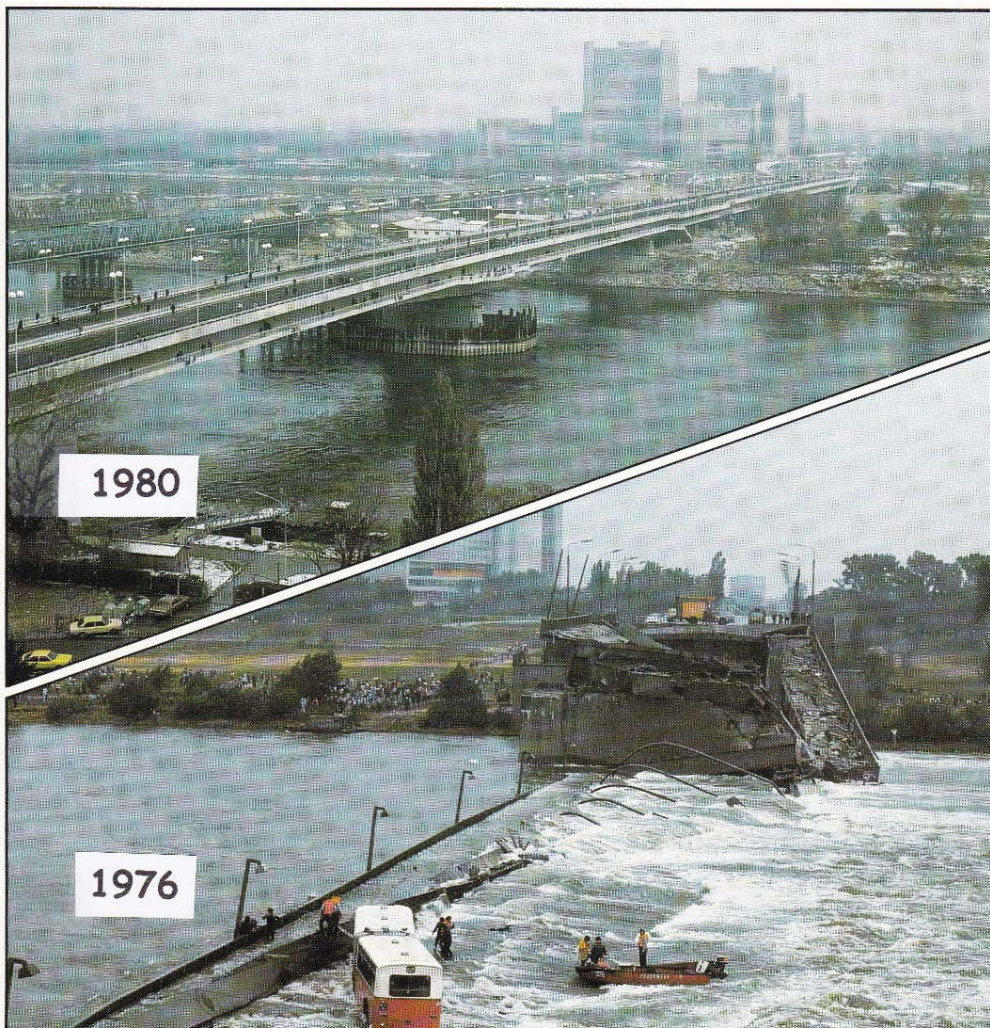
Koichi's interests were extensive and he collected informations in various areas of science. In those years, this meant collecting hardcopies, so the spaces in his office were remarkably filled with books, reports and photocopies of scientific articles, making a strong impression on his visitors.

After his retirement from the IAEA and his return to Tokyo, Koichi kept in contact with us NDS colleagues. Together with his wife Sanae he several times returned to Vienna for visits. During my one-month stay in Japan in October 2000, we met at a seminar at Hokkaido University, and I enjoyed his hospitality in his home in Tokyo.

Among the traits I admired in Koichi was his sense of humor – this talent to recognize the humorous aspect of a situation which is not originally meant to be funny. Sharing a good laugh, like sharing good food or good wine, is an excellent way to strengthen friendship. And among the many memories I have of him, his friendship is my most valuable memory of Koichi Okamoto.

Working at IAEA-NDS in the 1970s and 80s

A common experience Koichi and I shared was the move of the IAEA to its new headquarters. A few months before I joined the IAEA in 1975, the NDS offices had been „outsourced“ to a small office building in the 9th district of Vienna, because the headquarters in the city center (the former „Grand Hotel“) had run out of office space. Finally, in 1979, the IAEA moved to the new „Vienna International Centre“ (VIC) on the other side of the Danube, and we were the proud first occupants of the new offices on the 23rd floor of the „A-tower“ of the VIC. Unfortunately, the main bridge connecting both sides of the river, the *Reichsbrücke*, had collapsed in a spectacular accident in 1976, so for the first years, traffic to the VIC from the city center and the residential districts, where most IAEA staff lived, was a non-trivial and time-consuming exercise, using a narrow emergency bridge over the Danube. We felt rather



remote from the city, and the situation improved only 3 years later, when the subway line U1 was finally extended to the VIC, and the new *Reichsbrücke* was available for car traffic.

The tools for working with nuclear data were, of course, rather different from those in use today. The databases were still kept on a mainframe computer and data retrievals were made off-line. Computer terminals were used mainly by secretarial staff, for typing letters or other documents from manuscripts handwritten by the scientific staff. Much of the information was still available only on hardcopies.



Koichi Okamoto with long-term NDS head J.J. Schmidt