Keiji Sano—memories of meetings

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Professor Keiji Sano passed away at the age of 90 on 6 January 2011. We all miss this unique and outstanding personality, this mentor, and friend over decades to many neurosurgeons in Japan and around the world. Professor Sano was an honorary member of the German Neurosurgical Society and of many other scientific and neurosurgical societies around the world. Throughout his career, he was a member of editorial boards of numerous scientific periodicals and belonged to the first editors of *Neurosurgical Review* where this contribution is published in his honor (Fig. 1).

When I was seated last time beside Professor Keiji Sano, I felt not only deeply honored, as always, but somehow I had the impression that it might really be for the last time. This happened in Tokyo in October 2010 at the occasion of the 69th Annual Meeting of the Japanese Neurosurgical Society, a joint meeting together with the German Neurosurgical Society. Professor Sano, just discharged from hospital on the morning of the same day opened the banquet of this meeting in the traditional way. Thereafter, we had enough time to exchange ideas, and, like at other occasions, we talked more about the past than about the future.

Keiji Sano was born at the foot of Mount Fuji on 30 June 1920 [1]. He entered the University of Tokyo and graduated in 1945. He began his neurosurgical training under Professor Kentaro Shimizu. From 1951 to 1952 he specialized in the USA as a fellow of the Japanese Ministry of Education studying neurosurgery and neuropathology under Professor Naffziger and Professor Boldrey, respectively, at the University of California. In 1962, he was appointed as the Professor of Neurosurgery, holding the first chair of neurosur-

gery in Japan's history. Under his guidance, four study groups were created: neurophysiological and stereotactic surgery, head trauma, cerebrovascular surgery, and neurooncology. In the field of neurooncology, he and his co-worker Dr. Taka Hoshino, who later worked in San Francisco, developed new concepts for chemoradiotherapy of gliomas. Later, he focused on pineal and parasellar region germ cell tumors. He developed the posteromedial hypothalamotomy for behavioral disorders and pain, as well as thalamolaminotomy for intractable pain.

Professor Sano retired from his service at the University of Tokyo in 1981, changed to Teikyo University, and finally became director of the Fuji Brain Institute. Throughout his career, he published more than 900 scientific papers and monographs, 260 of them in English language [2].

Prof. Sano is regarded as the pioneer of modern neurosurgery in Japan. He established the present internationally recognized state of neurosurgery by founding neurosurgical research and clinical systems in Japan. His passion for neurosurgery and leadership in the field of clinical work and research paved the way for many young neurosurgeons.

The first time I met Professor Sano was in the fall of 1973. I was a young neurosurgeon, proud to present for the first time a paper at an international congress. It was my honor and pleasure to be introduced to him by my mentor Professor Hans Werner Pia. Sano was the president of the World Federation of Neurological Societies (WFNS) (1969–1973) and the president of the Fifth International Congress of Neurological Surgery held at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo. At that time, he experienced the first highlight in his international career, but also some shadow in his professional life, when a group of alternative and aggressive students opposed him due to his engagement in modern psychosurgery and occupied his office for many years. Pia was tied to Keiji Sano by a long-lasting and

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Fig. 1 Photograph of Professor Keiji Sano taken on 30 September 2008 at the 67th Annual Meeting of the Japanese Neurosurgical Society in Morioka

intensive friendship. Both are regarded to be the later founders of the Academia Eurasiana Neurochirurgica under the motto *Humanitati et Arti*, a motto that Professor Sano carried through his life. This includes his widespread social connections, his deep cultural interests, and his dedication to academic neurosurgery (Fig. 2).

In the spring of 1977, I became quite inspired by Professor Sano when I got the opportunity to guide him and his wife in Munich and southern Bavaria, at a time when Munich was chosen to be the next place for the 1981 WFNS meeting. How proud and happy he was to drive my rented Mercedes personally through the spectacular hilly Bavarian countryside—while I as a German would have rather favored a Japanese car! Sano was most interested in

Bavarian history, especially in the time period of King Ludwig II. Thus, we visited some of his castles, for instance in Neuschwanstein and Linderhof, the place where Ludwig II drowned in the Starnberger Lake together with his psychiatrist, the University Professor von Gudden from Munich.

At the first convention of the Academia Eurasiana Neurochirurgica held in Bonn under the presidentship of his friend Hans Werner Pia, Sano quoted Johann Wolfgang Goethe by heart. At the Rhine river, close to the Loreley rock, he also quoted Heinrich Heine, “Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten, dass ich so traurig bin, ein Märchen aus uralten Zeiten, das kommt mir nicht aus dem Sinn.”

I was so impressed when he decorated me as the youngest academy member with the membership needle, just as he did with all European members. Those from Asia, instead, were decorated by Hans Werner Pia. Without Sano’s effort, mind, and spirit, the scientific level and the development of membership of the academy would not have progressed in the same way. Two years later, Sano was the president of the Academia Eurasiana and hosted the participants in Hakone close to Mount Fuji. Many of us were introduced for the first time into Japanese hospitality and culture that we enjoyed so much. We also learned some aspects of the seniority principle in Asia, especially in Japan, where even retired academic neurosurgeons are never regarded as “inactive” members as they continue their professional activities for lifetime. Another example of the seniority principle in Asian society was the way of electing a new member of the board of officers of the Academia. Even recognized personalities, at least from the European point of view, were not admitted into the board when they were younger than 60 years of age. Apart from that, Sano always insisted to incorporate candidates from whom leadership could be expected. This quality was estimated higher than permanent presence at the meetings.

In the fall of 1995, following the opening ceremony of the joint meeting of the Japanese and German Neurosurgical Societies hosted by Professor Masashi Fukui in Fukuoka, we enjoyed musical contributions from the symphony orchestra of the Japanese Neurosurgical Society. Fukui, himself a baseball enthusiast and active hobby player enabled all

Fig. 2 Academia group photo. The participants of the Academia Eurasiana Neurochirurgica meeting held in Nara, Japan from 10 to 12 October 2004. Professor Keiji Sano is seated in the center, Professor Rudolf Fahlbusch on his left side

participants to attend the champion finals in the baseball dome directly connected to the Congress Hotel. He had organized this silently behind the scene as a surprise for all. The excitement was high as the local team (Hawks) had beaten the Tokyo team (Giants), before in the best-of-five series. Professor Sano enjoyed that his favored team played successful this time and explained me why. Before this event, I did not know that Sano had actively played baseball in his youth.

Humanitati et Arti

At another occasion, during the annual meeting of the Japanese Neurosurgical Society in Tokushima, Professor Sano invited me to visit together with him the Naruto German House in Bando. Soldiers from the “Deutsche Garnison” in Tsingtao (Eastern China) were taken as prisoners in 1917 and stayed in the prisoner’s camp for 3 years in Bando. The Japanese authorities allowed them to live and develop under these difficult circumstances nearly like in Germany. The musicians among them built new instruments, procured music notes, and finally presented Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony for the first time in Japanese history. Prof. Sano’s interest in music was focused on Beethoven and Mozart, but he was also very proud of one of his family members who became a Wagner singer—rather unusual at that time for a non-European artist. Later, we also visited together with Professor Hans Werner Pia the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth, Germany. During Professor Kintomo Takakura’s presidency of the Japanese Neurosurgical Society, the inauguration ceremony was held at the famous Suntory Hall in Tokyo. In the evening, my friend Helmut Deutsch from Vienna, a well-known concert pianist married to a famous Japanese opera singer gave a concert, and I was happy to fulfill Professor Sano’s wish to have dinner together with Helmut Deutsch and his wife in the meeting hotel. He really enjoyed talking a lot with Helmut about concert music.

When I was officially invited for the first time to attend the annual meeting of the Japanese Neurosurgical Society in 1982, Professor Sano invited me and the other foreign guest of the Society, Professor John Tew from Cincinnati, for dinner in the “On Top Rooms” of the New Otani Hotel. Standing at the window and looking over the non-ending lights of the huge capital Tokyo, he wished to know my opinion about the high number of 3,000 neurosurgeons in Japan and about his personal responsibility for their future.

Sano has visited many historical places and museums all over the world. Once he visited a museum in Hannover during one of his uncountable visits in Germany. I tried to translate a picture description to another visitor, Professor Emil Pasztor from Budapest, from German into English.

However, Professor Sano’s translation was much better than mine. During his student time, just after the Second World War, Sano had studied besides German, French, and English also the Latin and Greek languages.

I learned that the German influence in Japan was not only realized in industrial and military developments, but especially in clinical medicine. As early as 1882, Julius Scriba, an invited German professor of surgery, had influenced not only the structures in the medical faculty at Tokyo University but also operated for the first time on a female patient with a depressed fracture in the left parietal region that had caused monoplegia of the right leg.

With Sano’s intensive support, my friend Kintomo Takakura and I organized the first joint meeting of the Japanese and German Neurosurgical Societies held 1993 in Nürnberg. Professor Sano was the honorary president of this successful meeting that was followed by meanwhile six other joint meetings. A contract for a continuous German–Japanese cooperation and exchange of neurosurgical fellows was concluded after this joint meeting. At the governmental reception in the Nürnberger Burg, a famous convention place for political leaders in the Middle Ages and, by chance, also for neurosurgical leaders, I quoted article XVII from the oldest written law in Japan dating back into the year 604 under the regime of the famous Prince Shotoku Taishi (574–622):

Decisions of important matters should not be made by the person alone;

They should be discussed with many.

But small matters are of less consequence;

It is unnecessary to contact a number of people

Professor Sano’s special smile revealed to the people around him his profound agreement.

After one of the annual meetings of the Japanese Neurosurgical Society, a conference on radiooncology was held in Hakone (the original Asilomar Conference). I learned how deeply Professor Sano was interested in this field that he and Dr. Charles Wilson from the University of California in San Francisco had greatly influenced at that time. Much later, in 2002, at the Academy Convention in London, the 82-year-old Sano surprised us all with a remarkable lecture about the significance of molecular biology in brain tumors.

During breakfast in the Congress Hotel, I once sat together with Professor Lindsay Simon and Professor Madjid Samii and asked them whether they have heard anything about the “Sano Lecture” that should be given at the end of the annual meeting in a special symposium. Lindsay Simon answered, “I was the first Sano-lecturer” and Madjid Samii explained that he will also present a ‘Sano Lecture’.” So, he and I were the second and third Sano lecturers; I talked about brainstem cavernomas and Samii about craniopharyngiomas. It was Sano’s personal

merit to install this kind of international integration in Japan. On the other hand, he participated in countless international neurosurgical conferences. He has been many times in Germany, and there seems to be no significant academic or other place of special cultural interest that he would not know. Apart from Hans Werner Pia, he had many friends among senior neurosurgeons such as Fritz Loew and Rüdiger Lorenz who also played an important role in the foundation phase of the Academia Eurasiana Neurochirurgica and later on. Among numerous decorations, Professor Sano received the degree of honorary doctor of the University of Homburg/Saar in 1990.

When I was asked to write a contribution on Professor Sano's life by the editor-in-chief of *Neurosurgical Review*,

Helmut Bertalanffy, who also has a close personal relationship to Japan, this special event raised in my memory: Professor Sano lived cosmopolitically and individually with profound knowledge of the distinctive influence of history of which he meanwhile is an important part.

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