

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES OF PROFESSOR KODAIRA*

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It was in the late summer of 1958 in Princeton that I met Prof. Kunihiko Kodaira for the first time. We (my wife and I) had just arrived from Paris to spend one (actually two) academic year(s) at the Institute for Advanced Study. Since I was a student at Tokyo University in 1947-50 and he was an Assistant Professor of the Physics Department there in 1944-49, we must have had a chance to see each other, but I knew him then only by name.

Prof. and Mrs. Kodaira came to our house (the project house of the Institute) to say hello and kindly gave us a necessary guidance to live in the States and in Princeton. Prof. Kodaira told me that he had already started his course on the deformation theory of complex manifolds, in which he needed some details on exceptional Lie groups. But apparently my knowledge in Lie groups was not adequate to answer his questions so that I could only give him some relevant references.

At the Institute Prof. Kodaira and Don Spencer were running a seminar, called "Nothing Seminar", meaning that there is no restriction on the topics. I gave a couple of talks in this seminar, but did not attend it so regularly; Grauert and three Italian mathematicians, Andreotti, Calabi and Vesentini were among the regular attendants. I also had opportunities to attend some lectures of Kodaira at Princeton University and also later at Johns Hopkins University. His lecture was a kind of magic; it was so clearly organized that he needed almost no word of explanation. Once, in a party at Igusas, I heard Mumford raise a question asking how was it possible for Kodaira and Spencer to communicate to each other on such a complicated subject with such little conversation.

In Princeton, we often accompanied Kodairas to the weekend drivings in the suburbs. We had very enjoyable afternoons visiting Newhope, Washington Crossings, ... and very pleasant evenings in the concerts at the chapel of Princeton University. Also at many occasions they were so kind to invite us to dinner in their home. When we were relaxed, Prof. Kodaira liked to tell us many interesting stories (mostly anecdotes) of mathematicians and musicians. As is well known, he loved music, being himself a very good player of piano. He amused himself by saying there was some score of Bartok which was physically impossible to play. He was also interested in animals; sometimes he showed us a picture of a funny face of an animal or a fish saying it must remind us of a face of a famous mathematician.

But, when visiting his house, I was very impressed to see that he was ready to do mathematics at all times. In the living room and everywhere, beside each chair he had a chance to sit, I noticed there were some scratch papers with a trace of calculations. It is famous that he worked in the dining room rather than in his study. Many mathematicians would like to work in quiet isolated circumstances. But, Prof. Kodaira certainly preferred to concentrate in mathematics in the warm family

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atmosphere around Mrs. Kodaira.

I knew also Prof. Kenkichi Iwasawa very well, who was a teacher of mine at Tokyo University and was two and half years younger than Prof. Kodaira. It was a very interesting experiment in my mind to make a comparison of these two distinguished mathematicians. Contrary to Kodaira, Prof. Iwasawa showed little interest in music or biology, but was more interested in literature. While Kodaira had a large collection of records of classic music, we found a series of collected works of the novelists such as Ibuse Masuji and Tanizaki Jun'ichiro on the book shelves of Prof. Iwasawa. Though they were so different in their character, they had also some habits in common. Both of them did not drive car at all, perhaps because their wives were exceptionally good drivers (among Japanese wives). Both of them were indolent for traveling. — Once, in Woodshole, while I was with Prof. Kodaira, Andreotti approached him to make an offer; he wanted to invite Kodaira to Italy. He (Andreotti) said he would make all arrangements for the travel and pay all necessary expenses for Kodairas if only he would just come to Italy and give few lectures. I thought that was an extremely generous offer. But, Prof. Kodaira never said yes.

One of very few exceptions of his indolence for traveling was his trip to Israel in 1985 to receive a Wolf prize. Incidentally, around the same time I was also invited to Tel Aviv by Piatetskii Shapiro, who kindly made an arrangement for us to be permitted to the ceremony. It was an unforgettable experience for us, too. But, Prof. Kodaira, accompanied with his daughter Yasuko in Japanese kimono, looked a little tired after the long journey, many receptions, and lecturing in few universities.

Prof. Kodaira and his family had been back to Japan since 1967, around the same time I moved to Berkeley from Chicago. After we came back to Sendai in 1980, we occasionally had chance to meet Kodairas in Tokyo, sometimes in their home near Ikebukuro, though we could have less chance to meet in Japan than in the United States. I remember that he had a very good stereo video system in the dining room, by which he was enjoying the "rakugo" (Japanese comic stories) as well as music. Once, when we were visiting his house, Prof. Kodaira excused himself in a cheerful manner to go out to meet an electrician. Mrs. Kodaira commented to us that her husband was a very good customer of a nearby shop selling electronic equipments.

In 1986, when the Mathematical Society of Japan began organizing the ICM 1990 in Kyoto, he was designated to be the honorary president, and in the first few meetings he was serving as chairman of the organizing committee. By a telephone call from him, I was asked to be the chief editor of the Proceedings of the ICM, which I did with Springer-Verlag Tokyo. But, unfortunately, Prof. Kodaira had been suffering from asthma, which soon got worse to the extent that he had to give up all his duties in the ICM. Besides he had a trouble in hearing and could not enjoy music any more, which must have also affected his health. Few years after the Congress in Kyoto, we were told that he was hospitalized in Yamanashi, where a son-in-law of his (Yasuko's husband) was a doctor. In the summer of 1997 we were very saddened to hear that he finally passed away there. However, Prof. Kodaira will be remembered by us all for a long time to come, not only because of his great achievement in mathematics, but also for his warm and amiable personality which enchanted everybody who knew him.