



Dr. Masamichi Ota (1932- )

## Masamichi OTA, Museum Director, a Sketch of his Life and Work

Masamichi OTA was born on 17 February 1932 in Dangdong, Liaoning, China as the second son of Kiso and Shizuko OTA. His father was appointed headmaster of a junior high school in Fushun. With his father's movement OTA entered the primary school at Songo, Heilongjiang. Then OTA moved to Xi'an (now Liaoyuan) Primary School, that was later to become Xi'an National Primary School. After the completion of the course in 1943, he entered Lüshun Junior High School. His early interest in natural history, especially in palaeontology was kindled here when he saw many fossil specimens at the Manchurian Natural History Museum in Dalian.

However these were turbulent years. The school was closed at the end of World War II in 1945 and OTA spent almost a year as a forced labourer in a coal mine. He returned to Japan in September 1946 and entered the 2nd course at Tochiku Junior High School, Kitakyushu City, Fukuoka Prefecture. In 1948 he completed the junior high school course, moved up to Kokura High School and thence, in 1951, to Kyushu University from where he graduated from the Department of Geology, Faculty of Science in 1956. He read palaeontology at the same university from 1956 to 1958 to obtain his master's degree. He then became a lecturer at Ôtemae Junior High School in Kagawa Prefecture, a post he held 1959 to 1960 when he was appointed as a curator in the Akiyoshi-dai Science Museum (later Akiyoshi-dai Museum of Natural History), Yamaguchi Prefecture.

OTA worked tirelessly to develop this provincial museum under extremely difficult conditions, with acute shortages of staffs and funds throughout the years after war. Despite these adversities, OTA engaged in field research on the Akiyoshi Limestone Group and his completed studies of this formation formed his thesis, "The Akiyoshi Limestone Group: A geosynclinal organic reef complex". The title of Doctor of Science was bestowed on him by Kyushu University for this work in 1968. During the research he confirmed the evidences for the overturned structure of the Akiyoshi Limestone Group in the Kaerimizu doline area and summarized it with general geological works of Akiyoshi-dai and its surrounding areas, which was published as "Geological studies of Akiyoshi". This work was carried out partly in collaboration with Dr. W. SCHWAN, Germany, and its importance was recognized by the award to Dr. OTA of the Science Award of the Palaeontological Society of Japan in 1978. In addition to these works, he was also interested in speleology in the Akiyoshi limestone plateau. He hitherto published many articles about Japanese caves, and contributed to the Japanese speleology as a member of the Association of Japanese Cavers and Speleological Society of Japan for a long

time. As the President, he served on the Society in 1990–1992.

Following the finding of numerous fish fossils by primary school children in 1975, Dr. OTA led an excavation to research these fossils in Yamada, Kitakyushu, that was supported by the Cultural Affairs of Kitakyushu City in 1976 and 1977. This excavation yielded many Early Cretaceous fish fossils and a natural history museum was planned by the city to house them. The preparation office for the natural history museum was set up in Tobata, Kitakyushu in 1978 and the director was the late Prof. Emeritus Ryuzo TORIYAMA who was Dr. OTA's supervisor. Dr. Masamichi OTA left the Akiyoshi-dai Museum of Natural History and was appointed as deputy director-general of the preparation office. After three years' work, Kitakyushu Museum of Natural History was opened in 1981 in the Yahata Station building. The Director was the late Prof. Emeritus Ryuzo TORIYAMA and vice-director was Dr. OTA. Dr. OTA took over as director in 1984. During his directorate (1984–1998) the museum went through difficult times in planning to develop and finalize a new, permanent home, but OTA was equal to the challenge of these organizational and administrative tasks. As a result of his leadership, the Kitakyushu Museum of Natural History has collected and developed rich collections from all over the world both to provide a basis for research and also for public exhibition and education.

The new museum building will be opened in 2002 to house and display the collections now in Yahata.

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