The Biophysical Society of Hong Kong (BPHK): past, present, and future

Guang Zhu¹

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During the 1990s, the number of government-supported universities in Hong Kong increased from three to seven. This period of growth was accompanied by the recruitment of a large number of active scientists to teach at these institutions. The Biophysical Society of Hong Kong (BPHK) was established in 1994 to represent the biophysics community of Hong Kong under the auspices of the International Union of Pure and Applied Biophysics (IUPAB), providing a platform for the Hong Kong biophysicists to interact among themselves and with their international colleagues. A by-law of the society was drafted in the first organizing meeting held on April 16, 1994, and a group of local biophysicists were appointed to organize the 1st BPHK conference, which was held on January 27, 1995. More than 50 people participated in this conference on the beautiful campus of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST).

During this conference, the founding officials for the society were elected. They were President Prof. Donald C. Chang (Department of Biology, HKUST), Vice president Prof. Sze Yong Zee (Department of Botany, University of Hong Kong), Secretary Dr. W. F. Fong (Department of Applied Science, City University of Hong Kong), and Treasurer Dr. F. S. L. Kwok (Department of Applied Biology and Chemical Technology, Hong Kong Polytech).

In the meantime, we were contacted by Prof. Nanming Zhao, President of the Biophysical Society of China, who proposed to expand the previous China-Japan Bilateral Biophysics Conference into a new and larger East Asian Biophysics Symposium (EABS). Prof. Zhao expressed his

hope to include biophysicists in Hong Kong in this new organization. Thus, since BPHK's founding, the society had sent delegates to participate in every EABS meetings before 2006, including the 2nd EABS held in Beijing, China (May 16–20, 1997), 3rd EABS held in Kyongju, Korea (May 22–26, 2000), 4th EABS held in Taipei, Taiwan (November 4–6, 2003), and 5th EABS/ABA held in Okinawa, Japan (November 12–16, 2006). EABS was renamed Asian Biophysics Association (ABA) at its 2006 meeting. BPHK has continued its representation in all ABA meetings since that time. Besides the above activities, BPHK also co-sponsored regional scientific conferences related to biophysics such as the Hong Kong/French Conference on Calcium in Development held in 2000 at HKUST.

After BPHK was formally established in 1995, it joined IUPAB and became an official member of that organization (in the status of Observer). In addition to international conferences, the BPHK has organized or participated in several local meetings including 1st–6th Guangdong-Hong Kong Joint Biophysics Conferences and the 7th Guangdong-Hong Kong Joint Biophysics Conference (Hong Kong, January 27, 2007).

At its local meeting in January 2007, new officials of the society were elected as follows: Prof. H. Benjamin Peng (Department of Biology, HKUST) as president, Prof. Guang Zhu (Department of Biochemistry, HKUST) as vice president, Prof. Pingbo Huang (Department of Biology, HKUST) as secretary, and Prof. Xiaoyuan Li (Department of Chemistry, HKUST) as treasurer. In addition, four Council members were elected from other local universities.

Following the decision of ABA's Executive Committee in 2006, BPHK hosted the 2009 ABA conference in Hong Kong. It was a very successful meeting with more than 150 attendees (Fig. 1).

At its local meeting in November 2017, an election was again held and the following new officials were elected—President Prof. Guang Zhu (Division of Life Science, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology), Vice president Prof. Pingbo Huang (Division of Life Science, Hong Kong

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✉ Guang Zhu
gzhu@ust.hk

¹ Division of Life Science, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Clear Water Bay, Kowloon, Hong Kong SAR, China

Fig. 1 Photo of the 6th ABA meeting (Hong Kong, 2009)

University of Science and Technology, Treasurer Prof. Hyokeun Park (Department of Physics, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology), Secretary Prof. Wenjun Xiong (City University of Hong Kong), and five Council members from local universities. The current membership of the BPHK has swollen to 45. The official address of the BPHK is the Division of Life Science, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Clear Water Bay, Hong Kong, SAR, China. The temporary contact email address for the BPHK is gzhu@ust.hk.

As examples of the diverse interests represented by BPHK membership, the founding president Prof. D.C. Chang was a pioneer in using spin-echo NMR technique for studying cellular water in biological tissues (Chang et al. 1972; Hazlewood et al. 1972; Li et al. 1999), Prof. H. Benjamin Peng was a neuroscientist with research interest in signaling mechanisms of synapse formation (Peng et al. 1981; Peng and Poo 1986; Dai and Peng 1993), and Prof. Guang Zhu is a biomolecular NMR spectroscopist who has developed several widely used techniques and is currently working on structure-functions of G-quadruplex DNA/DNA (Zhou et al. 2012; Liu et al. 2019; Geng et al. 2019).

In summary, BPHK has contributed to the local and international biophysics community in organizing several conferences aiming at advancing the discipline in recent years, including the 6th ABA Symposium (Hong Kong, November 2009) and several local meetings held in conjunction with the Hong Kong Society of Neuroscience (HKSNS) Annual Meeting (in 2010, 2012, and 2014).

Recently, Hong Kong has seen a dramatic increase in the number of biophysicists recruited by local universities. They represent a spectrum of research interests including optical/magnetic tweezers, single-molecule FRET, cryo-EM, NMR, super-resolution optical spectroscopy, x-ray crystallography, single cell DNA and RNA sequencing, and many other sub-disciplines of biophysics. As a result, a large number of students and postdoctoral fellows have been attracted to the discipline. In the near term, we plan to revamp the society to serve the community including setting up a website to promote BPHK activities and to foster collaborations among local researchers. In the longer term, we intend to actively participate in organizing/co-organizing conferences in the region, such as future ABA symposia, to foster international collaboration among colleagues in our discipline.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest Guang Zhu declares that he has no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by the author.

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