Thirteenth Symposium on Nucleic Acids Chemistry

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This symposium, the latest in the series, organized by Professor Ken-ichi Tomita of Osaka University, is dedicated, in a foreword by Eiko Ohtsuka, to Professor Morio Ikehara, one of the best-known researchers in the field, and an initiator of these symposia, on the occasion of his retirement.

The format of this small paperback is that of the journal Nucleic Acids Research, produced by the same publisher. It includes more than 70 abstracts of communications presented. But these are not simply abstracts, since most of them occupy the maximum allowable 4 pages, and hence present considerable details. The majority of contributions is by Japanese researchers and reflects their impressive achievements in this important field.

The biologist should not be misled by the title; a more appropriate one might have been 'Biological Applications of Nucleic Acid Chemistry'. The presentations range over widely varying topics such as, e.g. the various forms (A, B, Z) of nucleic acids, including the crystal structure of a left-handed RNA tetramer; interaction of antitumour drugs with nucleic acids; cloning of human epidermal growth factor gene, endogenous retrovirus-like sequences, the RNase T1 gene; synthesis of capped RNA fragments and their interactions with ribosomes; tRNA properties and function; specificity of interaction of λ *cro* repressor with defined operator DNA fragments. Three of the contributions describe the chemical syntheses of new analogues of 2′-5′-oligoadenylates, known to be implicated in the antiviral activity of interferons.

Overall, this small volume, the rapid publication of which was made possible by the use of offset print, provides an up-to-date bird's-eye view of the variety of strategies developed by organic chemists, frequently in collaboration with biochemists, geneticists, enzymologists and biologists from other disciplines, to undertake and resolve numerous problems in molecular biology. Even a cursory perusal of the contents, because of their diversity, may present readers with some new ideas relevant to their own research problems. It is to be hoped that the rapid publication of such lengthy abstracts will be continued in future symposia, with perhaps a reduction in price to make it more readily accessible to the individual reader.

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