

My recollections of Hyo Chul Myung

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Hyo Chul Myung made his Ph.D. at the Michigan State University under the supervision of M.L. Tomber, a student of Adrian Albert who is the first African American mathematicians. All his mathematical life Prof. Myung was fascinated by Octonions, which underline all exceptional structures in Algebra.

I grew up in Novosibirsk mathematical school and therefore also liked Octonions. I had known Myung's work long before he came to a conference in Novosibirsk in the Summer of 1989 when we met for the first time. It is typical when mathematicians who never met but know each other's work meet as old friends.

In the Fall of 1989 I visited the US for the first time in my life. Over 3 months I gave colloquiums at 15 different universities. When I came to the University of Wisconsin - Madison, Professor Myung together with two young Spanish mathematicians, Alberto Elduque and Fernando Montaner, who visited him at that time came to Madison and then drove us all back to his university at Cedar Falls. We spent a few days together and talked about everything. By American tradition we called each other by the first names. Later at the KIAS I called him Hyo in private, but never in public. Hyo was older and more experienced but I never felt difference in ages. F. Montaner who was Hyo's post-doc and who is essentially younger than me told me the same. Hyo was at the same time charmingly old fashioned and open



to everything new. I always supported him in his endeavours (like starting new journals) and all his friends did the same, because Hyo inspired trust. I could call it leadership quality.

Hyo loved America and had strong political views. He always voted for Democrats though I don't know if he was a card carrying member of the party. But Korea was his Motherland and his heart was in Korea. In mid-90s he took visiting positions, first at the Postech, then at the KAIST. At the KAIST, it then grew into a permanent position, though at that time he still has not resigned in Iowa. In 1994 a life changing event happened to me too : I was awarded a Fields medal. After that I visited Hyo at the KAIST and stayed there for a month. Like all Mathematics Departments in Korea the KAIST Math Department was young. It consisted of recent Ph.D.s from top US universities. I could see that Professor Myung had a very special position at the Department, his younger colleagues looked up to him.

At about that time the idea of KIAS was circulated in the Korean scientific community. Professor Myung got naturally involved in it. He was the right person at the right place at the right time. As I said above, Korean scientific community was predominantly young, whereas in Korean tradition people until they reach a certain age were not seriously considered for positions of influence. Professor Myung knew what to do as he was a natural leader. He was appointed the acting president of KIAS when the KIAS existed only on paper. When Professor Myung asked me to join the project I immediately

agreed. On one hand the project looked interesting and I trusted Prof. Myung one hundred percent. On the other hand there was little risk on either side.

The first president of the KIAS was Professor C.W. Kim, a renowned physicist from the Johns Hopkins university with Professor Myung staying as vice president. The vice presidential position at that time was particularly important as Prof. C.W. Kim had to share his time between Seoul and Baltimore. It is fair to say that C.W. Kim and H.C. Myung ran the Institute together. I remember a New Year's party at the KIAS when the President and the Vice President together cut a cake. That was very symbolic.

I can imagine that between themselves the President and the Vice President had arguments and perhaps did not always agree. But on important issues they looked eye-to-eye. And they has very similar ideas of what kind of an Institute they wanted to build. First of all they had the will and the character strength to resist pressures to hire fast. I remember empty corridors of the Institute and questions from journalists: you have positions, why don't you hire? C.W. Kim and H.C. Myung set up the standards very high. They would not hire anybody less than outstanding. They knew how to identify talents and how to court them. Through all this crucial period the KIAS was driven by very steady hands.

In 2007 Professor Myung was appointed the President of the KIAS. Through all this years Professor Myung displayed his famously strong character, but privately he felt the stress of responsibility. It was so important to do things right.

H.C. Myung never had a chance to retire and he has never been old. [KIAS](http://www.kias.ac.kr)

