The Official History of the Asian-Pacific Society for Neurochemistry (APSN): From a Founding Vision to an Enduring Legacy



1.0 The Founding Vision: From a Single Conversation to a Regional Society

In the early 1990s, the global neurochemistry landscape was robust, yet the vast and diverse Asian-Pacific region lacked a unified platform for its scientists. The establishment of a regional society was a strategic imperative to connect researchers, foster a distinct scientific identity, and create a collaborative network capable of addressing the unique challenges and opportunities within the region. This need for cohesion and mutual support set the stage for the creation of the Asian-Pacific Society for Neurochemistry (APSN).



The origin of APSN can be traced to a single, pivotal dinner held in Sydney in 1991, during a meeting of the International Society for Neurochemistry (ISN). Four leading neurochemists—Graham Johnston and Lawrence Austin from Australia, alongside Yasuzo Tsukada and Kinya Kuriyama from Japan—gathered to discuss a shared vision. At this informal meeting, they articulated the core purpose of what would become APSN: to create a society dedicated to fostering collaboration, providing mutual support, and cultivating a strong regional identity for neurochemists across the Asia-Pacific. This foundational conversation laid the essential groundwork, leading directly to the establishment of the first official APSN meeting in Nagoya, Japan, in 1992, marking the formal birth of the society.

2.0 The Pillars of APSN: Profiling the Founding Pioneers

2.1 The Japanese Visionaries

The contributions of the Japanese founders were instrumental. As the author of this history, I was initially hesitant to overemphasize this point, being Japanese myself. However, Professor Graham Johnston, the only one of the four founders still with us, strongly encouraged me to share just how profoundly important their role was to the society's creation.



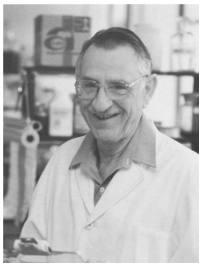
- **Professor Yasuzo Tsukada:**
  - A foundational pioneer of neurochemistry in Japan and a key figure in the establishment of the Japanese Society for Neurochemistry.
  - Served as a respected advisor to the Japanese government on scientific matters.
  - His research was renowned, with significant contributions to the fields of amino acid metabolism, behavioral neurochemistry, and developmental neuroscience.



- **Professor Kinya Kuriyama:**
  - A global leader in the study of GABA, taurine metabolism, and addiction neuroscience.
  - Distinguished himself by building a top-tier pharmacology department at Kyoto Prefectural University.
  - Remembered by colleagues not only for his scientific acumen but also for his profound generosity as a mentor.

2.2 The Australian Visionaries

Complementing the Japanese visionaries were two of Australia's most respected neurochemists, whose scientific rigor and collaborative spirit were equally crucial to APSN's formation.



- **Dr. Lawrence "Lawrie" Austin:**
  - A brilliant scientist and renowned mentor at Monash University, known for his kindness and rigor.
  - A strong advocate for hypothesis-driven neuroscience, instilling a high standard of scientific inquiry.
  - Remembered for his respectful, gentlemanly nature and his appreciation for French culture and wine.



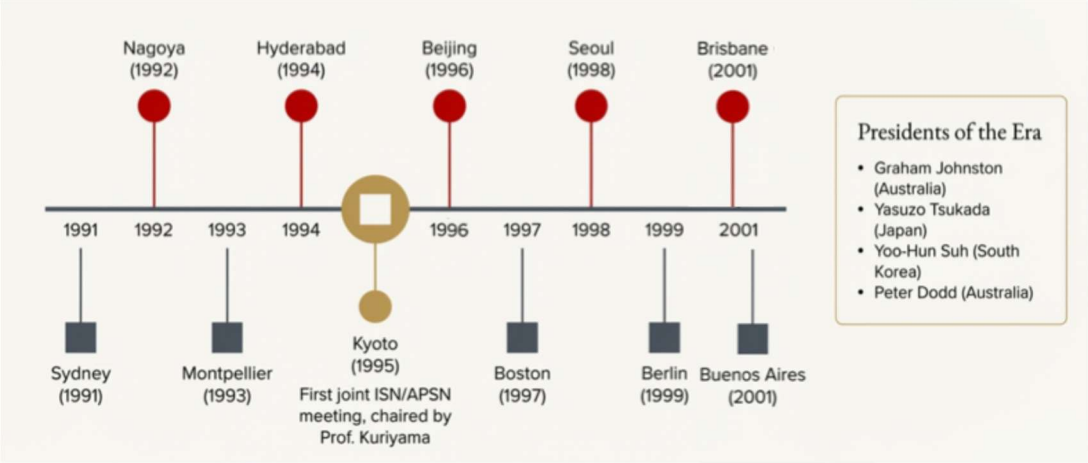
- **Professor Graham Johnston:**
  - neurotransmitters, particularly GABA.
  - His work was pivotal in defining GABA receptors and their clinical roles, and he developed key pharmacological compounds like muscimol and bicuculline.
  - Remains an active and influential figure, passionate about science policy and tennis, and played a crucial role in bringing the founding members together.

The foundational work of these four pioneers established a culture of collaboration and excellence that would be carried forward by a new generation of leaders as the society grew and evolved.

3.0 A Chronicle of Growth: Conferences and Leadership Across Three Decades

The history of APSN is a narrative of steady expansion, intellectual exchange, and evolving leadership, best charted through its series of biennial conferences. These meetings have served as the society's lifeblood, providing a consistent forum for scientific advancement and community building. The following chronicles the society's growth across three distinct eras, each defined by its conference locations and the presidents who guided its mission.

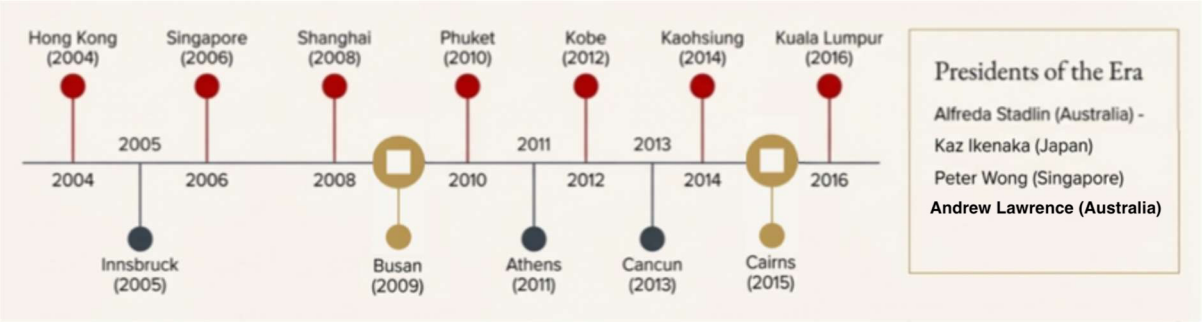
3.1 The Early Years (1991-2003): Establishing a Presence



The society's first decade was a foundational period focused on establishing its presence and rhythm. A key strategic decision was to alternate its conferences with the larger ISN meetings, creating a predictable and complementary schedule for members. A major milestone of this era was the first joint ISN/APSN meeting held in Kyoto in 1995, an event locally chaired by founder Professor Kinya Kuriyama, which solidified the society's international standing. The leadership during this formative period was provided by the inaugural president, **Graham Johnston**, followed by **Yasuzo Tsukada**, **Yoo-Hun Suh** (South Korea), and **Peter Dodd** (Australia).

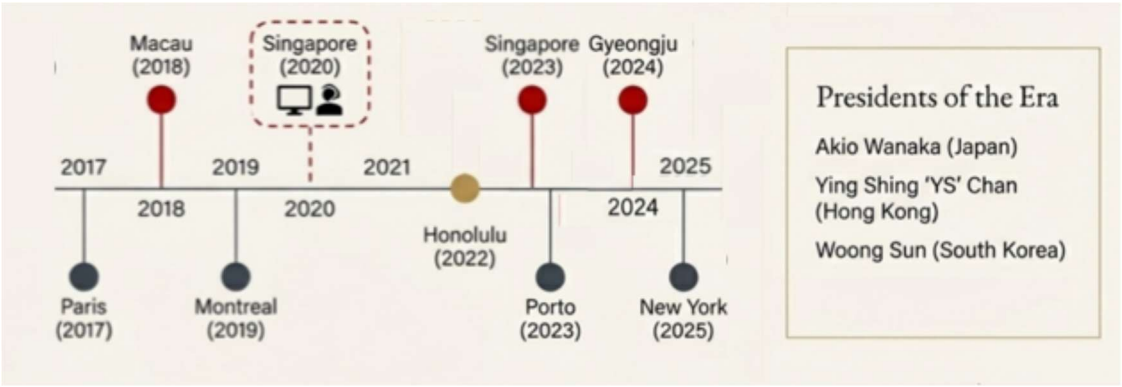
3.2 A Period of Expansion (2004-2016): Deepening Regional Engagement

This era was characterized by steady growth, with APSN expanding its scope and deepening its engagement across the Asia-Pacific region. The society's biennial conferences became premier events, attracting a growing number of scientists. This period was guided by a series of dedicated presidents who built upon the foundational work of their predecessors. **Alfreda Stadlin** (Australia) was known for her deep passion for nurturing young scientists. She was succeeded by **Kaz Ikenaka** (Japan) and **Peter Wong** (Singapore), both of whom worked tirelessly to advance the society's mission before their untimely passing. Their efforts paved the way for **Andy Lawrence** (Australia) to continue building on this strong foundation.



3.3 Navigating the Modern Era (2017-2027): Resilience and Transformation

The most recent era has been one of profound challenges and remarkable transformation, dominated by the global COVID-19 pandemic. This period tested the society's resilience and required agile leadership. Following the term of **Akio Wanaka** (Japan), Presidents **Ying Shing Chan** ("YS") of Hong Kong and **Woong Sun** of South Korea provided exceptional leadership through the crisis. They not only steered the society through uncertain times but also transformed its operations by embracing online platforms for meetings and educational activities. Their focus on encouraging greater participation from a younger, more dynamic council has resulted in a society that is arguably stronger and more connected than ever before.



The vision and direction set by the society's presidents have always been realized through the dedicated, behind-the-scenes work of the broader APSN council.

4.0 Building the Network: The Indispensable Role of the Council

The success and expansive reach of APSN have never rested solely on its presidents. The society's strength is a direct result of the collective dedication of its many council members, who work tirelessly to organize events, promote neurochemistry, and build scientific networks. This diverse group of leaders ensures that APSN remains a vibrant and representative body for the entire Asia-Pacific region.

The geographical distribution of past and present council members reflects the society's wide influence, with leadership drawn from Japan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong SAR, Macau SAR, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, India, and Australia. This diversity

is a core strength, though it also highlights opportunities for future outreach to connect with developing neuroscience communities in regions not yet represented.

The contributions of these council members have been vital to APSN's progress.

- **Prakash Babu (India):** Served for many years as the Secretary of APSN, playing a central and sustained role in the society's development.
- **Piyarat Govitrapong (Thailand):** Successfully led the Phuket meeting as its Local Chair.
- **Samuel Chan (Taiwan):** Chaired the memorable and successful meeting in Kaohsiung.
- **Ranil de Silva (Sri Lanka), Piu Chan (China), and Yukio Yoneda (Japan):** All worked with great energy and commitment to promote APSN's goals during the 2004-2016 period.
- **Pankaj Seth (India):** Demonstrated remarkable dedication to education by playing a leading role in organizing the online APSN Schools.
- **Pike See Cheah (Malaysia):** Served as Local Chair for the Kuala Lumpur meeting and has since become a council member of ISN.
- **Yi Zhun Zhu (Macau SAR):** Chaired the APSN meeting in Macau.
- **Chian Ming Low (Singapore):** Served as an APSN Counciler and Officer
- **Kwok On Lai (Hong Kong SAR):** Known for his calm and gentle personality, which helped ensure council discussions remained smooth and constructive.
- **Dan Ohtan Wang (Japan/UAE):** Contributed significantly as a School lecturer with strong scientific credentials.
- **Itsuki Ajioka (Japan):** A long-serving member who played a major role in bringing the ISN-APSN, served as the School Chair, and is now becoming an ISN council member.

5.0 Fostering the Next Generation: The APSN Schools

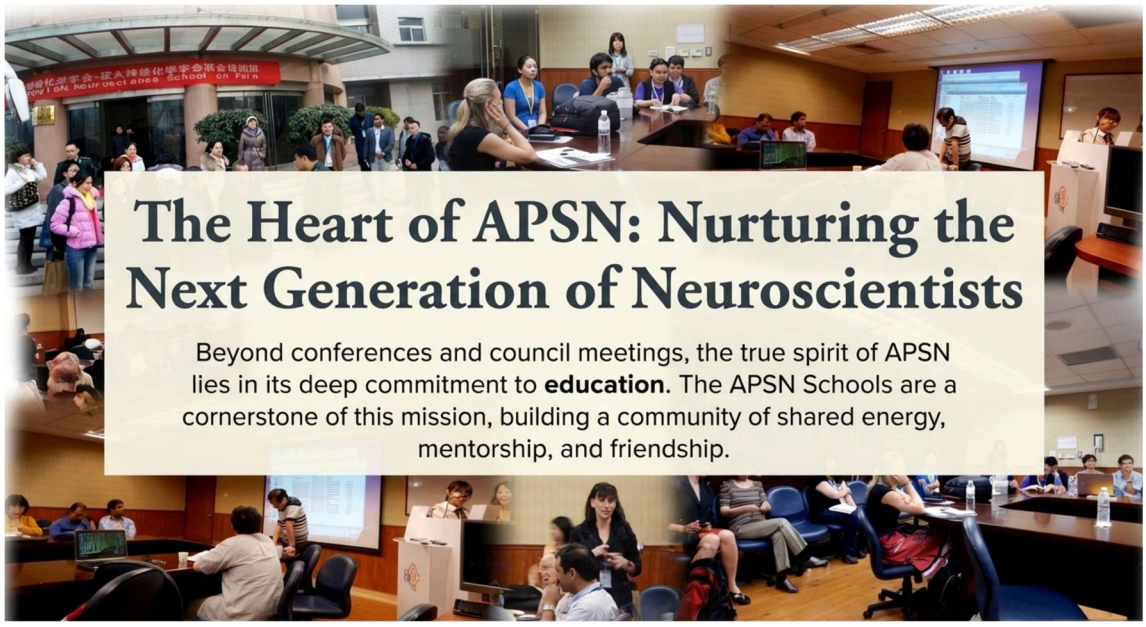
The APSN Schools are a cornerstone of the society's educational mission and represent its most direct investment in the future of neuroscience in the Asia-Pacific region. These intensive training programs are strategically designed to equip the next generation of researchers with cutting-edge knowledge and practical skills, while also building a strong sense of community and a lasting professional network among early-career scientists.

APSN organizes two main types of Schools. The **meeting-associated Schools** are typically lecture-based, providing participants with strong theoretical foundations in conjunction with the biennial conferences. In contrast, the **independent Schools** often feature hands-on laboratory experiments, offering a more practical, immersive experience in techniques such as electrophysiology and behavioral neuroscience.

A summary of APSN Schools held since 2009 includes:

- **2009:** Cochin (India)
- **2010:** Bangkok (Thailand)
- **2012:** Osaka and Nara (Japan); Xi'an (China)
- **2013:** Singapore
- **2014:** Kaohsiung (Taiwan)
- **2015:** Daegu (South Korea)
- **2016:** Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia)
- **2017:** Sendai (Japan)
- **2018:** Macau (Macau SAR)
- **2021:** 1st Online School
- **2022:** 2nd Online School
- **2023:** Singapore
- **2024:** Daegu (South Korea)

The impact of these schools extends beyond the curriculum. The 2012 independent school in **Xi'an, China**, for instance, provided a highly meaningful, practical experience focused on pain-related neurochemistry. The school in **Kaohsiung, Taiwan**, combined academic lectures with memorable cultural excursions, including a visit to the world-famous restaurant Din Tai Fung, demonstrating how shared experiences build a special sense of community. A group photo from the school in **Daegu, South Korea**, wonderfully captures the spirit of APSN. In it, everyone is pointing to their heads. What does it mean? Honestly—we're still trying to figure that out! It is moments like these that remind us that APSN is not just a scientific society, but a community built on shared energy, mentorship, and friendship.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, APSN demonstrated its adaptability by successfully pivoting to an online format. The **1st and 2nd Online Schools** were praised for their outstanding scientific quality and high level of engagement, providing a vital platform for learning when travel was impossible. The success of these events led directly to the creation of the APSN Webinar Series, further expanding the society's educational reach.

6.0 In Memoriam: Honoring Enduring Legacies

The strength of APSN lies in its people and the deep sense of community it fosters—a community built by dedicated members, some of whom are no longer with us but whose legacies endure.

6.1 In Memory of Professor Peter Wong



Professor Peter Wong was a pillar of the APSN community and is considered by many to be the "fifth" key figure in the society's creation. He played an essential, behind-the-scenes role in organizing countless APSN activities, and his leadership as the chair of the Kaohsiung meeting remains particularly memorable. More than his organizational skills, Peter is remembered for the warmth and infectious positivity that archival photograph so vividly capture: smiling with his wife Eileen.

6.2 In Memory of Professor Kaz Ikenaka



Professor Kaz Ikenaka was a brilliant scientist and a deeply respected leader whose influence extended across the globe. His international stature was affirmed by the rare honor of having served as President of both APSN and ISN. A leading figure in myelin biology and glial cell research, Kaz was also a generous mentor and a tireless organizer who was instrumental in bridging APSN with the global ISN community. Beyond his scientific achievements, he was beloved for his humility, warmth, and subtle sense of humor.

The enduring legacies of these and other departed leaders continue to inspire the society's ongoing mission to advance neuroscience and build community.

7.0 Conclusion: An Enduring Vision for Neurochemistry in the Asia-Pacific

From its origins in a single, visionary conversation, the Asian-Pacific Society for Neurochemistry has grown into a dynamic and influential organization. Its history is a testament to an enduring core identity built on three pillars: scientific excellence, regional collaboration, and a deep-seated sense of community. Over three decades, APSN has achieved remarkable success. It has established a robust network of biennial conferences that serve as premier forums for scientific exchange. Through the APSN Schools, it has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to fostering the next generation of neuroscientists. Furthermore, its ability to adapt and innovate, particularly during the global pandemic, has proven its resilience and forward-thinking leadership.

The strong foundation laid by its pioneers and cultivated by successive generations of dedicated presidents and council members has positioned APSN for a vibrant future. The society is poised to continue its vital mission: to advance the frontiers of neurochemistry and connect scientists across the vast and diverse Asia-Pacific region for decades to come.