Preface

Isao Tada

In Mar. 2013, two of the editors, I. Tada and T. Yoshimura enjoyed a sentimental journey to Guatemala C.A. together with Dr. K. Hirayama, the former chief editor of Tropical Medicine and Health (TMH). We visited the tomb of our deceased friend Dr. O. Ochoa who died 10 years ago, had good times with intimate friends, and then visited the laboratory of the Ministry of Public Health where we engaged in research several decades ago. In that time, we heard from the staff a plan to celebrate in the year 2015 the discovery of onchocerciasis 100 hundred years ago by R. Robles. This news reminded us vividly of the memory of our collaborative research project for the control of onchocerciasis or Robles disease in 1975–83 based on the official development assistance (ODA) of Japan in Guatemala. We three soon agreed to record this project on the TMH by publishing a special issue in the centenary year 2015 and to invite colleagues involved in the same project to work as editors together.

The year 2015 is in the 100th year from the year when Dr. R. Robles discovered onchocerciasis for the first time prior to Africa in its symptoms, pathogenic parasite and possible vector insect in Guatemala C.A. After Robles discovery, it was recognized that Africa was the major endemic continent of this disease. Further in Guatemala, Dr. P. Luna soon clarified the ophthalmological feature of this disease as blinding disease. Actually this disease has been called as river blindness in Africa. The term “Robles disease” has thus been proudly used in Latin America meaning onchocerciasis.

As this disease was a big social burden in Central America particularly in mountainous plantations, a control campaign, surgical denodulization, has been continued for more than 30 years in vain. In 1975, the Guatemalan Government requested Japanese Government for technical cooperation to control this disease. A large scaled control program has already started in West Africa headed by WHO in terms of OCP, Onchocerciasis Control Program, based on vector control strategy. Therefore Japan started an ODA technical cooperation project at completely different geographic features in America since the fiscal year 1975. It was just a sheer accident that Japan started a research cooperation of onchocerciasis at its birthplace. Judging from the start, it will be the 40th year in 2015. Throughout this project, a cumulative total of more than 80 Japanese scholars participated and engaged in various field of research and control. Many young researchers experienced research in laboratory and field of Guatemala and later they expanded their research activities widely in the field of tropical medicine. In Guatemala, many scientists for examples O. Ochoa, G. Zea, C. Monroy were brought up and worked actively in the research, health sector and education.

Lamentably Dr. S. Hayashi, Dr. H. Figueroa, Dr. H. Takahashi and Dr. T. Suzuki who were the leading people of this project have already left. So, the publication of this special issue is quite significant to keep their names and roles in the cooperative project.

We planned editing of this issue in order to leave a record on the above mentioned Japan’s technical cooperation to Guatemala for the research and control of onchocerciasis (1975–1983). Editors decided to cite only review articles which were already published elsewhere in journals and books in order to avoid emotional or subjective descriptions in this commemorative document. They were cited with generous permissions of each publication organizations or academic societies. Only one chapter entitled “The Dream of Dr. Figueroa” (3-2)) was newly written by one of the editors, Dr. I. Tada. Because the editors wanted to record the ignition mechanism which acted on the launch of this research project.

As to the discovery of Robles disease, the Chapter 2-1) written by Dr. Figueroa which was published almost 50 years ago will give its details. The Chapters 3-1) and 2) cited reports of JICA and Guatemalan authorities, respectively, which covered the whole process and outcomes of the cooperative projects. Evaluation and criticism on the project were mentioned in the excerpts of JICA report (3-1)). Sorry to mention, but the English translation of these two reports was performed by editors ourselves. We are responsible for possible poor translation.

In the articles 1)–3) of Chapter 4, the history of involvements of Japanese Society of Parasitology (JSP) in
the international health was recorded chronologically. This chapter will show footprints of members of JSP concerned in the field research in developmental countries. In the entomological field activities of this project, review articles of two authors, Dr. H. Takaoka and Dr. K. Ogata showed important findings obtained in this project in the articles 4) to 6).

In the Chapter 5, we compiled a list of 105 scientific articles produced in this project. They were the valuable properties produced by the participants in this cooperative research project.

On Oct. 5, 2015 when I was in the final stage to check the galley proof of this issue, an exciting news appeared on TV. It was a flash report on the award of Dr. S. Omura with Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his marvelous discovery of Ivermectin now globally used in the mass drug administration for the onchocerciasis control in APOC/OEPA. Coincidentally in the historic 100th year of the discovery of onchocerciasis by Dr. R. Robles, the event seemed to present bouquet to this Guatemalan physician.

Finally we appreciate Dr. K. Moji, the former President of Japanese Society of Tropical Medicine, and Dr. M. Hashizume, the Chief Editor of the Journal of JSTM, who approved kindly the publication of this memorial issue. We refer an address of special gratitude to the publishing companies, societies and JICA which admitted quotation of review articles willingly in this issue.

Further I want to thank Dr. L. Ash of UCLA and Dr. E. Gomez of Catholic University (Ecuador) for their literal check of the manuscripts, to Ms. T. Moriyasu, Dr. F. Kojima, Ms. M. Hamasaki, Ms F. Hara, Ms. Thelma Figueroa Micheo and, Dr. S. Hamano and Ms. M. Fukuda for their kind contribution in the editorial process and to Mr. Y. Maruta for his kind cooperation in Guatemala.