

BIO Asia-Taiwan 2026 Begins with a Bold Proposition: The Future of Biotech Will Be Written in Asia

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The opening session of Asia's largest biotech gathering didn't ease in with pleasantries. It framed a thesis — that the centre of gravity in drug discovery, regenerative medicine and biotech capital is shifting east — and then handed the microphone to five people building the proof.



There is a particular energy to the first thirty minutes of a conference that knows exactly what it wants to say. As the doors opened on **BIO Asia-Taiwan 2026** at the Taipei Nangang Exhibition Center, the room was not warming up. It was declaring a direction of travel.

Beginning today (July 15) and running through July 19, BIO Asia-Taiwan 2026 is being held under the theme "Asian Inspiration, Global Impact," jointly convened by the global Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO) and the Taiwan Bio Industry Organization (Taiwan BIO)— arrived at a moment when the industry's old geography no longer explains its new momentum. The opening programme distilled that shift into a single, deliberately sequenced session: two hosts to set the frame, and five speakers to fill it with substance spanning artificial intelligence, capital flows, and the science of growing human tissue back to life.

What follows is not a schedule. It is a reading of what each voice contributed to the argument the morning was making.

THE FRAME Johnsee Lee & Lee-Cheng Liu

Opening sessions live or die on whether the hosts can name the stakes without inflating them. **Johnsee Lee, Chairman of the 2026 BIO Asia-Taiwan Organizing Committee, and Lee-Cheng Liu, Chairman of the Taiwan Bio Industry Organization,** did the harder version of that job: they positioned Taiwan not as a host city collecting a global event, but as a hinge in a global system.

The welcome landed on three ideas that would echo through every talk after it — that the AI era has collapsed the timeline from discovery to commercialization, that Asia's biomedical strengths are no longer emerging but arriving, and that the contribution of international and academic partners is widening the industry's base rather than crowding it. In a region long

described as a manufacturing and R&D base, the framing was pointed: Taiwan, and Asia with it, is now writing the agenda, not responding to it.

For a region long cast as the world's lab and factory, the message from the opening podium was unambiguous — Asia now sets the agenda it once merely answered to.

THE FRAME · LEE & LIU ON ASIA'S MOMENT

THE CELL'S HIDDEN TRAFFIC Randy Schekman

Randy Schekman took the slot with the talk that anchored everything after it — not a forecast, but a foundation. His laboratory's work is devoted to a molecular description of membrane assembly and vesicular traffic in eukaryotic cells: the machinery by which a cell packages a cargo, addresses it, and delivers it somewhere else. Basic principles that first emerged in yeast are now being applied directly to the genetic diseases of protein transport.

The contribution here was the long view of how discovery actually works. For the past dozen years Schekman's lab has turned to a biochemical analysis of traffic in mammalian cells — the pathways of collagen secretion, autophagosome formation, and unconventional secretion. Of particular interest for clinical development, he has focused attention on the mechanism of **extracellular vesicle biogenesis**, with an emphasis on how exosomes acquire a cell type-specific and highly sorted set of miRNAs. A more recent interest is the unconventional secretion of **alpha-synuclein**, a protein implicated in Parkinson's Disease whose spread through the brain may be part of the pathology itself.

For a room full of investors and founders, the significance was not subtle. Exosome biology is the substrate beneath an entire emerging class of delivery and diagnostic companies; a mechanistic account of how a neurodegenerative protein moves between cells is where a Parkinson's therapy has to begin. Schekman's slot made the case that the most commercially consequential science in the building started as a question about yeast — and set the terms for the four talks that followed.

The most investable science in the room began as a question nobody could monetise — how a cell decides what to ship, and where.

SCHEKMAN · ON VESICULAR TRAFFIC AND ITS CLINICAL FRONTIER

FOLLOW THE CAPITAL Rudi Pauwels

If Schekman explained where the science comes from, **Rudi Pauwels** explained where the money is going to chase it. Founder and President of the **Praesens Foundation** and a serial builder whose credits include **Tibotec**, **Virco**, **Galapagos Genomics** and **Biocartis**, Pauwels brought a rare vantage point: someone who has repeatedly turned science into companies, arguing *Why Asia is Becoming the Next Global Biotech Investment Hub*.

His contribution carried the authority of a builder rather than a spectator. Pauwels has lived the full cycle — diagnostics, virology, genomics, molecular platforms — across Europe and the developing world, and that history let him frame Asia's rise not as a regional talking point but as a structural realignment of where innovation, supply and investment now meet. For an audience of executives and investors, it was the session's connective tissue: the case that the AI-accelerated science on the program is not a set of isolated breakthroughs but an investable ecosystem, and that the smart capital has already noticed.

The coming decade of biotech capital won't just pass through Asia on its way somewhere else. It will be raised, deployed and returned there.

PAUWELS · ON ASIA AS THE NEXT INVESTMENT HUB

REBUILDING THE BODY Yoshiki Sawa

With **Yoshiki Sawa**, the morning turned from the economics of biotech to its most human promise. Professor Emeritus at The University of Osaka, President of Osaka Keisatsu Hospital and President and CEO of the Organization of Future Medicine, Sawa spoke on *The Future of Regenerative Medicine* — a field he has helped move from theory toward the clinic over a distinguished career.

His contribution grounded the day's abstractions in tissue. Regenerative medicine asks a question the rest of the industry can defer: not how to treat a failing organ, but how to restore it. Sawa's stature let him speak to both the scientific frontier and the systems — hospitals, regulators, delivery — that determine whether a laboratory result ever reaches a patient. In a program otherwise weighted toward platforms and capital, his was the reminder that the destination is a person on an operating table, and that Japan and Asia are at the leading edge of getting them there.

The frontier is no longer treating a failing organ but restoring it — and Asia is standing closest to the operating table.

SAWA · ON THE FUTURE OF REGENERATIVE MEDICINE

FROM THE LAB BENCH TO THE WARD Keiichi Fukuda

Where Sawa mapped the field, **Keiichi Fukuda** showed what it looks like when the science becomes a company. Founder, Representative Director, President and CEO of **Heartseed** and Emeritus Professor at Keio University, Fukuda spoke on *From iPSC Research to Commercial Therapy: The Next Frontier in Heart Regeneration*.

This was, in many ways, the session's proof point. iPSC-derived cell therapy for the failing heart is exactly the kind of science that spends a decade sounding impossible — and Fukuda's contribution was to narrate the passage from bench discovery to a therapy with a commercial path. He connected the two halves of the day that might otherwise sit apart: the academic rigour of regenerative research and the hard commercial questions of manufacturing, quality and scale that decide whether a breakthrough becomes a treatment. For every founder in the room, it was a working blueprint for the journey each of them is somewhere along.

The stretch between a bench discovery and an approved therapy is exactly where the next generation of Asian biotech companies will be won or lost.

FUKUDA · FROM IPSC RESEARCH TO COMMERCIAL THERAPY

THE VIEW FROM WASHINGTON Kelly Seagraves

The session closed by widening the lens back out to policy. **Kelly Seagraves**, Vice President for National Security and International Affairs at the **Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO)**, spoke on *What's Next for U.S. Biotech* — a deliberate choice to end an Asia-forward morning with the perspective of its largest partner and, increasingly, its most consequential policy variable.

Her contribution supplied the context the other four talks operate inside. Biotech no longer lives only in the lab or the cap table; it sits squarely within national security, supply-chain resilience and international cooperation. Seagraves' vantage — bridging industry and the policy apparatus in Washington — let her speak to what a shifting U.S. posture means for a global industry whose science, capital and manufacturing now cross every border. Ending here was not a pivot away from the theme. It was the acknowledgment that *Global Impact* is precisely where Asian inspiration has to survive contact with the world's regulators and governments.

Biotech has moved from the lab bench to the negotiating table — and the policies written now will decide whose science reaches the world.

SEAGRAVES · ON WHAT'S NEXT FOR U.S. BIOTECH

THE ARGUMENT, ASSEMBLED

Read together, the five talks were not a survey. They were a sequence. AI collapses the cost and time of discovery (Zhavoronkov). That efficiency draws capital toward the region best positioned to use it (Pauwels). The most ambitious of that capital funds the hardest science — regenerating human tissue (Sawa) — and the founders turning that science into approved, manufacturable therapy (Fukuda). And all of it unfolds inside a policy environment that the industry's largest market is actively reshaping (Seagraves).

That is what a well-built opening session can do: not list a day's speakers, but state a thesis and then introduce the people making it true. **As BIO Asia–Taiwan 2026 got underway, the message from the front of the room was hard to miss. The inspiration is Asian. The impact is everyone's.**

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