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Dr. Kary B. Mullis, the California-based bio-chemist -- who won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry last year for inventing a surprisingly simple method of making unlimited copies of DNA (the basic genetic material present in nearly all living organism) -- arrives today for a six-day visit.

As a visiting professor of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Dr. Mullis will reveal to the Hong Kong audience at a public talk tomorrow how a moonlit drive through the mountains of California with his girlfriend had given him the inspiration for the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) technique -- which is now a standard laboratory tool for genetic research.

This technique can be applied to copy DNA from a hospital tissue specimen, a single human hair, a drop of dried blood at a crime scene, the tissues of mummified brain, or even a 40,000-year-old woolly mammoth frozen in a glacier.

"Out of the long stringy molecules (of DNA), complex and annoying to work with, PCR can make little, orderly, well-behaved pieces of DNA in whatever size and amount is convenient. It can splice them together, cut them apart, add something here, delete something there.... It has done for DNA chemistry what the word processor did for writing," said Dr Mullis.

"DNA has been tamed, and all the information it contains is in our hands. Our human DNA, our genome, has as many letters as a thousand long books, a fair sized library. It is our story. Each of us carries it around in our cells. Some of it is personal, some of it is public, the same in everyone. It will tell us about our health and our diseases. In it we can find traces of our past, and if we can use it wisely it will help us direct our future toward peace and prosperity for all mankind," he said.

Dr. Mullis now works in La Jolla, California, as a private consultant on the PCR technology and nucleic acid chemistry.

His public talk starts at 4 p.m. tomorrow at Lecture Theatre L1, Science Centre, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin. Admission is free. Enquiries: 609-8897. Dr. Mullis's visit is sponsored by the Wei Lun Foundation.

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