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Pro-Science Stimulus to Revitalize Japan’s R&D

Today, after two decades of economic stagnation, Japan’s vitality and dynamism is almost palpable. As part of Prime Minister Shinzō Abe’s Japan Revitalization Strategy, the country has set its sights on strengthening efforts in research and development, improving health technology and services, and elevating the status of its universities as well as reaching out globally for knowledge sharing and talent circulation. By Julian Tang

Science and technology research has been a reliable pillar of the Japanese economy. The steadily increasing national research budget acknowledges the importance of research and development (R&D) for the country as well as its role in finding solutions to Japan’s urban, environmental, and economic challenges. For instance, in August 2014 the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)—the leading official body in coordinating and funding science and technology initiatives in Japan—requested US$11.1 billion for science and technology spending in its proposed budget for the next fiscal year. This represents an 18% increase from the previous year. At the same time, MEXT is targeting US$2.4 billion—a 5.8% increase—to grants-in-aid for scientific research to fund individuals, universities, and research centers.

Areas of focus for R&D efforts

Providing sufficient research funding will enable Japanese scientists to respond to the country’s changing landscape. As part of the Japan Revitalization Strategy, officially approved by the Cabinet in June 2013, the government aims to position Japan as the “world’s most innovation-friendly country.” The government has identified five main goals to achieve by 2030: a clean and economical energy system, a healthy and active aging society, a framework of next generation infrastructures, substantial economic benefits through regional and international collaborations, and a complete recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. To meet these goals, the government has set a target of at least 4% of GDP for total R&D investment by the public and private sectors, and at least 1% of GDP invested in R&D by the government.

Promoting international, interdisciplinary research

In 2007, MEXT established the World Premier International (WPI) Research Center Initiative to attract top-flight researchers from around the world to the initial five—now nine—designated centers. These centers, which include the Kavli Institute for the Physics and Mathematics of the Universe (Kavli IPMU), are granted a significant level of autonomy to encourage revolutionary and innovative research. “Access to world-class facilities, and the opportunity to interact and collaborate with researchers across various disciplines, are some of the many appealing aspects of conducting research at a WPI center,” says Hitoshi Murayama, Kavli IPMU director, who has extensive overseas research experience and understands the importance of global talent circulation. “In addition to allowing our researchers to go overseas to gain ample international exposure, we invite world-leading researchers here regularly to share their ideas and knowledge.”

Kavli IPMU’s interdisciplinary approach, which bridges the gap among mathematics, physics, and astronomy, is helping researchers in these fields to achieve new advances. The Subaru Measurements of Images and Redshifts (SuMIRe) project, which involves collaborations with Princeton University, the California Institute of Technology, the Max Planck Institutes, and other research organizations from Japan, Taiwan, and Brazil, has already completed its first instrument—a three-ton imaging camera—that will allow for a “cosmic census” of each galaxy. The next stage is to build an US$80 million spectrograph to extend the census. “Just like a population census, a large-scale cosmic census allows us to get the full picture of how a system works and behaves,” explains Murayama. “We would be able to determine distances to the galaxies and study the physical properties of stellar and gas compositions in each galaxy.”

Upcoming Features

Postdocs—August 28 ■ Faculty II—September 18 ■ Faculty III—October 9
“Under [the Brain/MINDS] project, we will address a fundamental question in neuroscience: How does the human mind work?”
— Akira Yoshida

To maintain its foothold in large-scale, world-class research, Japan has launched its own Brain Mapping by Integrated Neurotechnologies for Disease Studies (Brain/MINDS) project, in line with the increasing interest in brain-mapping projects around the world, such as the Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) Initiative project in the United States and the Human Brain Project (HBP) in Europe. The Brain Science Institute (BSI) at RIKEN, Japan’s largest research organization, and the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology Graduate University (OIST), an interdisciplinary graduate university located at the southernmost tip of Japan, have been collaborating with the HBP since 2013 and applying their expertise in supercomputer-based models and simulations. Recently, BSI RIKEN and OIST were also invited by MEXT to be part of the 17-institute Brain/MINDS project, with BSI RIKEN as the core administrative and research facility. “Under this project, we will address a fundamental question in neuroscience: How does the human mind work?” reveals Akira Yoshida, research coordinator at BSI RIKEN. “The project’s goal is to accelerate the development of technologies for mapping the brain’s circuitry in animal models, specifically in the marmoset monkey, whose neural circuits are much closer to human compared with rodent models, and to connect the results to the diagnosis and treatment of human neurological disorders and mental illness.”

Amid these dynamic developments, Japanese universities are not being overlooked. MEXT has launched the Program for Promoting the Enhancement of Research Universities, choosing 22 universities to lead the country’s efforts in advancing science and technology. The financial support ranges from US$2 million to US$4 million annually for 10 years. The selected institutes include well-established former Imperial Universities such as The University of Tokyo, Kyoto University, and Osaka University, and private institutes such as Keio University and Waseda University. Despite the differences, the chosen universities have all made kokusaika (“internationalization”) one of their highest priorities. They share an impressive track record of increasing the number of overseas researchers and students, improving international collaborations, introducing English language courses for students, training administration staff to produce bilingual documents, and introducing new salary scales to commensurate with institutes in Western countries.

Global collaborations
To support globalization projects, MEXT further selected 37 Japanese universities in September 2014 to become Super Global Universities, providing an annual subsidy from US$100 million to US$400 million to each of the chosen institutes over the next 10 years for personnel training, recruitment of international researchers, and improvement of university facilities. In parallel, MEXT has launched personnel exchange programs such as Research in Japan and Japan-Asia Youth Exchange Program in Science as well as joint research initiatives with East Asian nations and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Under MEXT’s exchange programs, Japan has hosted over 30,000 international researchers in the last few years, while 150,000 local researchers have had the opportunity to pursue their studies overseas. “Under the forward-thinking leadership of MEXT, Japanese research organizations and academic institutions are certainly progressing towards globalization,” notes Jonathan Dorfan, president of OIST. “When people free themselves from their traditional boundaries and come together to share ideas and information, big things can happen.”

In a move to promote global health, the Department of Health Policy at The National Center for Child Health and Development (NCCHD), the largest maternal and pediatric hospital in the country, has been collaborating with the World Health Organization and the Japanese branch of the Cochrane Collaboration to improve clinical practice guidelines and maternal and child health in developing countries such as Mongolia and Sri Lanka. The hospital welcomes researchers from developing nations to share their research know-how. In return, these researchers, who usually face a shortage of technology and physical infrastructures, have access to the sophisticated instruments and facilities in Japan.

Meanwhile, in the private sector, Japan has also become the first nation to approve commercialization of a first-line drug for psoriasis vulgaris and psoriatic arthritis from the Swiss pharmaceutical company Novartis. The drug, sold under the name Cosentyx, is considered by experts to have a market value of US$1–2.5 billion annually. The city of Yokohama is also anticipating the construction of Apple’s new, large-scale R&D facility, one that Prime Minister Abe pointed out would provide significant employment opportunities and is comparable to the company’s largest existing R&D facilities in Asia.

Translational research and initiatives for a healthier future
Globally, the areas of maternal health and pediatrics are often overlooked, with too little funding being allocated and too few trials conducted. However, to safeguard the well-being of future generations, it is crucial to tackle genetic...
The University of Tsukuba campus is located at the heart of Tsukuba Science City, about 45 minutes north of Tokyo on the Tsukuba Express train. The modern structure of the university was established in 1973 after the reorganization of its predecessor, the Tokyo University of Education, whose roots go back to 1872. The huge campus—similar in size to New York’s Central Park—is home to approximately 16,500 students and 4,000 faculty and administrative staff. The university offers a comprehensive curriculum including arts and social sciences, physical education and sports sciences, physical sciences and engineering, and medicine. Distinguished scholars affiliated with the university include Nobel Laureates Leo Esaki (Physics, 1973), Hideki Shirakawa (Chemistry, 2000), and Sin-itiro Tomonaga (Physics, 1965).

The University is nominated as one of the top eleven research universities named RU11 in Japan. The university has been supported by “The program for promoting the enhancement of research universities” and “Top Global University Project”, which are national projects aimed at the world’s top-level research university.

Tsukuba Science City is the Center of Research and Development
Tsukuba is one of the world’s largest science and knowledge-based regions in the world. It has 32 research and academic institutions, approximately 20,000 researchers, and more than 7,000 foreign workers.

International Institute for Integrative Sleep Medicine (IiIS)

Faculty Position:
✓ WPI-IiIS Postdoctoral Fellows
✓ Junior Principal Investigators

IiIS, founded in December 2012, is one of nine institutions in the World Premier International Research Center Initiative (WPI) supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan. The implementation period as a WPI institution is 10 years. The ultimate research goal of IiIS is
- To elucidate the fundamental mechanism of sleep/wakefulness
- To develop strategies to regulate sleep
- To contribute to the enhancement of world health through combating sleep disorders and associated diseases

All applicants must have obtained a Ph.D. degree. We offer enough start-up funds for Junior Principal Investigators, a high degree of work autonomy, and a highly international research environment with new state-of-the-art equipment and facilities. Candidates are encouraged to have a strong background in one or more of the following areas: Neuroscience, Physiology, Behavioral Neurobiology, Molecular Genetics, Cell Biology, Biochemistry, Medicinal Chemistry, Organic Chemistry, Bioinformatics, Clinical and Social Medicine, Psychiatry, Sleep Medicine.

Candidates should send a curriculum vitae, bibliography, statement of research interests and a list of references to iiis-career@un.tsukuba.ac.jp. Only electronic submissions will be accepted.

Applications and Details
http://wpi-iiis.tsukuba.ac.jp/position/

Numerous other positions are available

tsukuba.ac.jp/english/update/jobs.html
“It is crucial for every child to be followed up annually until the age of 21 by a pediatrician—as is done in the United States—to detect hereditary disorders and pediatric diseases as early as possible. We are working towards implementing a similar system here in Japan.”

— Takashi Igarashi

conditions and diseases in the pediatric population. NCCHD understands the importance of establishing a research-intensive hospital to address these issues. Takashi Igarashi, president and chief executive officer of NCCHD, strives to bring together clinicians and basic scientists both at the domestic and international level. “We believe that medicine and basic research are complementary to each other. Clinicians are well-versed with the human body and the delicate use of surgeries and drugs, while scientists understand the intricacies of how the body functions at the molecular and cellular level,” he explains. “Tackling childhood diseases at an early stage allows for a healthier general population in the long run.” NCCHD is the only hospital in the country that performs fetal surgery, particularly for cases with twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome, a rare condition in which the blood supply in the shared placenta is unequally distributed, leading to one twin lacking the necessary nutrients for normal growth and survival. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) has designated NCCHD as the principal center to establish a national registry of rare pediatric diseases.

Further, NCCHD is leading the effort to introduce “Bright Futures,” a national children’s health promotion initiative that has been adopted by the American Academy of Pediatrics for well-child care, in Japan. “It is crucial for every child to be followed up annually until the age of 21 by a pediatrician—as is done in the United States—to detect hereditary disorders and pediatric diseases as early as possible,” notes Igarashi. “We are working towards implementing a similar system here in Japan.”

The journey ahead

Over the next 15–20 years, Japan must tackle key economic, human power, and demographic issues such as a declining birth rate, an aging population, and the challenge of sustaining a sufficiently skilled labor force. Furthermore, Japan is facing rising competition from regional nations in terms of attracting foreign talent and boosting research output. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Science, Technology and Industry Outlook 2014, a review of key trends in science, technology, and innovation policies, and performance in more than 45 economies, South Korea and China are now the primary destinations for researchers from the United States and experienced a net “brain gain” over the period 1996–2011. South Korea also became the world’s most R&D-intensive country in 2012, spending 4.36% of its GDP on R&D, versus an OECD average of 2.4%. The 2013 SCImago Journal and Country Rank list shows that Japan is also lagging behind China in terms of the number of scientific publications.

Nonetheless, the Abe government expects a prompt return on its investment in research. About a quarter of the science stimulus in the Japan Revitalization Strategy—some US$1.8 billion—is allocated for commercialization of university research. Much of the rest is for projects with industrial or clinical applications. The stimulus, for instance, will also aid in the renovation of the RIKEN SPring-8 synchrotron, one of the top photon science research facilities in the world, and the construction of data links between Japan’s universities and RIKEN’s K supercomputer, the world’s fastest computer in 2011 and still ranked fourth today.

As MEXT’s Program for Promoting the Enhancement of Research Universities moves forward, improving global rankings and attracting top-class foreign researchers are two of the main challenges. Despite having the honor of producing the largest number of Nobel Prize laureates in Asia, Japan is not well represented in the ranking tables for global universities. With only two universities listed in the top 100 2014–2015 Times Higher Education World University Rankings, Japan is on par with Singapore, China, and Hong Kong, but behind South Korea, which has three. Many of the universities have declared that part of the MEXT program’s funding will be used to push their institutes higher in the rankings by the end of the 10-year program.

To nurture the next generation of researchers and health professionals, NCCHD has acquired funding from the MHLW to provide new training opportunities. “It is important to equip younger members of our community with up-to-date knowledge and training. We need to adopt new ideas and system reforms to cater to the demands of this evolving world, especially in a country like Japan where we experience many dynamic changes and challenges,” states Igarashi, who emphasizes the importance of maintaining R&D and science education funding to make research careers attractive to young clinicians and scientists in Japan and around the world.

How and whether the Japanese government’s effort will pay off remains to be seen. However, one thing is certain: Globalization is inevitable and Japan realizes it. Murayama sums it up, “We need to make a conscious effort to expand our horizons and stay connected globally. Looking at Japan in the context of this global community is like looking at the universe with the most powerful camera, we gain a new perspective by seeing the big picture.”

Julian Tang is a medical editor and freelance science writer based in Tokyo, Japan

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Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) considers diversity to be one of the crucial factors for sustaining vitality in its basic research environment, and thus seeks to recruit one or two full-time female and/or foreign-nationality Academic staff(s). Successful applicant(s) will work as an associate and/or assistant professor at Institute of Space and Astronautical Science (ISAS), as described below;

**Title and Number of position(s):**
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**Summary of the Position (Contents of Work and Required Ability):**
An applicant may either think of enhancing a research theme that is already dealt at ISAS or propose to set-up a new research theme that will expand the research horizon of ISAS. While being productive in academic research, a successful applicant is also expected to participate in space science projects conducted at ISAS. Please see <http://global.jaxa.jp/about/employ/index.html> for further details.

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The region has a diverse economy that is strongly influenced by agriculture, health care, and higher education. The Department of Cell Biology and Biochemistry currently has thirteen outstanding junior level candidates being sought who work in any area of Women’s Health, including but not limited to breast/ovarian cancer and endocrinology/reproductive biology. Appointments will be in the School of Medicine and come with highly competitive start-up packages. Applicants should have a Ph.D. and/or M.D. degree, a funded independent research program, and be willing to contribute to the research and teaching missions of the department. TTUHSC has recently established imaging and molecular core facilities available to all faculty including a newly acquired Nikon Ti-E microscope with A1 confocal and STORM super resolution. The Department of Cell Biology and Biochemistry currently has thirteen full-time faculty members with research programs in biochemistry, cancer, cell and molecular biology, and reproductive biology (http://www.ttuhs.edu/SOM/cbb/). The TTUHSC Cancer Center has many resources available to researchers including the Texas Cancer Research Biobank, and the Texas Cancer Cell Repository (http://cancer.ttuhs.edu). The Cancer Prevention Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) (http://www.cprit.state.tx.us) provides outstanding opportunities for research funding (including recruitment grants) for cancer investigators in Texas. The Department of Cell Biology and Biochemistry is committed to diversity in education and employment and strongly encourages applications from women and minorities.

TTUHSC is in Lubbock, Texas, a city of over 230,000 residents on the South Plains of the Texas Panhandle. The region has a diverse economy that is strongly influenced by agriculture, health care, and higher education. Lubbock is home to Texas Tech University providing entertainment opportunities in collegiate athletics and the performing arts. Lubbock weather is mild and averages 262 days of sunshine/year. Interested candidates must apply online at http://www.ttuhs.edu/som/cbb/positions.aspx. Candidates should submit a single document in PDF format containing a cover letter describing their interest in the department including possible collaborations with current faculty, a curriculum vitae, and a brief summary of their research interests with the electronic application. Candidates should also arrange to have three letters of recommendation sent in electronic format to cellbiology.biochemistry@ttuhs.edu. Review of applications will begin on April 15, 2015 and will continue until the positions are filled.

The TTUHSC is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action/Veterans/Disability Employer.
Faculty Position in Microbiota
at the Ecole polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL)

The School of Life Sciences at EPFL is expanding and invites applications for a faculty position in the field of microbiota with relevance to nutrition, metabolism, gut-brain axis, or other aspects relevant to human health & disease. We are primarily seeking candidates for a tenure track assistant professor position but in exceptional cases more experienced candidates will be considered.

Successful candidates will develop an independent and dynamic research program, participate in both undergraduate and graduate teaching, and supervise PhD students and postdoctoral fellows.

Significant start-up resources, research budget and state-of-the-art research infrastructure are available, within the framework of a campus that fosters very strong interactions between life sciences, basic science, informatics and engineering. Translational research is encouraged. Salaries and benefits are internationally competitive.

Candidates should upload their application as PDF files at the address https://academicjobsonline.org/ajo/jobs/5418 and should include: cover letter, curriculum vitae, publication list, brief statement of research and teaching interests, names and e-mail addresses of 3 references. Interviews will start from June 1, 2015.

Further questions can be addressed to:

Prof. Stewart Cole
Director of the Global Health Institute
Email: GHI-recruit@epfl.ch

For additional information on EPFL, please consult http://www.epfl.ch http://sv.epfl.ch/

EPFL is committed to increasing the diversity of its faculty, and strongly encourages women to apply.

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The Department of Microbiology, Immunology and Cell Biology
West Virginia University School of Medicine
invites applications for the
Open Rank Faculty Position in Neural Injury-Related Inflammatory Disease Research

The Department of Microbiology, Immunology and Cell Biology (http://medicine.hsc.wvu.edu/micro/) seeks a distinguished immunologist as tenure-track faculty (rank open) to further its scientific exploration and discovery that targets prevention and treatment of inflammatory diseases associated with neural injury or neurodegeneration. The successful applicant will hold a primary faculty appointment in the Department of Microbiology, Immunology and Cell Biology as well as membership in the WVU Center for Neuroscience (http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/wvucn/) in the WVU School of Medicine.

This joint recruitment with the Center for Neuroscience provides an exceptional opportunity to participate in robust, interdisciplinary basic and translational research and training programs in a highly collaborative atmosphere. The appointed faculty will be expected to conduct research on neuroinflammatory disease and teach immunology to medical, graduate and undergraduate students. The successful candidate will be an investigator with a PhD in a biomedical discipline or MD/PhD degree with the PhD in a biomedical discipline and at least two years of postdoctoral experience. The successful candidate will also have an accomplished track record of independent research, demonstrated by high quality publications in peer reviewed journals. Applicants with expertise and interest in the role of regulatory and/or non-coding RNA in neuroinflammation are encouraged to apply. Dedicated laboratory space and competitive operating funds will be made available.

Founded in Morgantown, WV in 1867, West Virginia University is one of only 11 research intensive land grant institutions offering a single health sciences campus with accredited Schools of Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing, and Pharmacy and a formative School of Public Health. WVU is West Virginia’s major research and development center, and its only comprehensive doctoral granting institution. Our faculty conduct research totaling over $138 million in sponsored contracts and grants per year. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching classifies WVU as a comprehensive doctoral institution with medical programs – placing it among only 50 such public and 28 private institutions nationwide.

Nominations, applications (including a cover letter, vita, statement of research interests, and list of 3 professional references), expressions of interest, requests for information, or confidential inquiries should be directed (preferably electronically) to:

Christopher F. Cuff, Ph.D., Chair, Search Committee
c/o Barbara Pritt (bpritt@hsc.wvu.edu)
Department of Microbiology, Immunology and Cell Biology
West Virginia University School of Medicine
Morgantown, WV 26506-9177

The position remains open until filled.

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West Virginia University is the recipient of an NSF ADVANCE award for gender equity.
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Professor of Climate and Weather Risks

The Department of Environmental Systems Science (www.usys.ethz.ch) at ETH Zurich invites applications for the above-mentioned professorship.

The position will be jointly at the Swiss Federal Office of Meteorology and Climatology (MeteoSwiss) and the Department of Environmental Systems Science. This framework provides a wide range of opportunities for collaboration in the areas of climate variability and uncertainty, as well as climate impact scenarios, Earth system science, the interpretation of climate model data, engineering and societal risks and others.

The successful candidate is expected to develop an innovative research program that makes important scientific contributions to methodologies managing climate and weather risks associated with both climate variability and climate change. The research portfolio should include quantitative methodologies using probabilistic approaches to address climate and weather risks, and include stakeholder involvement. The core research activity could be in one or more fields related to climate change adaptation, treatment of uncertainties in risk assessment, or linking climate and weather predictions and climate change scenarios to decision making. Candidates should have an excellent international track record in disciplinary as well as system-oriented multidisciplinary research, and be able to effectively lead a research team. Furthermore, the new professor is expected to develop classes for students focusing on the development of quantitative methods, and interdisciplinary courses introducing students to the challenges and successful practices in applied policy areas. Undergraduate level courses are taught in German or English, and graduate level courses in English.

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Applications should include a curriculum vitae, a list of publications, and a statement of future research and teaching interests. The letter of application should be addressed to the President of ETH Zurich, Prof. Dr. Lino Guzzella. The closing date for applications is 15 May 2015. ETH Zurich is an equal opportunity and family friendly employer and is further responsive to the needs of dual career couples. We specifically encourage women to apply.