

S&T News from East Asia Pacific

March 2008

National Science Foundation Tokyo Regional Office

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Japan

1. [1,000 Ph.D. students from Vietnam] The Japanese government will initiate a project in JFY2008, using its ODA (Official Development Aid) funds, that will support 1,000 young Vietnamese to enroll in Ph.D. programs at Japanese graduate schools. It is a strategic partnership program between Vietnam that is in shortage of Ph.D. personnel and Japan where the number of students going into Ph.D. programs is decreasing due to a decline in birthrate. Presently 25 Vietnamese students are enrolled in Ph.D. programs in Japan, and the new initiative will gradually expand the number to 1,000 by 2020. University of Tokyo, Kyoto University, Waseda University, Ritsumeikan University, and Nagaoka Institute of Technology have already expressed strong interest in receiving students from Vietnam. Although the economic growth rate in Vietnam is high at 8.5 percent as of 2007, they currently have only 6,000 Ph.D. holders. Vietnam has a plan to produce 20,000 Ph.D. holders by 2020, half of whom they plan to train overseas. Vietnamese Education Minister and Japan's Ministry of Education, S&T (MEXT) signed a memorandum on this cooperation on March 25. (Summary translation of an article in Asahi Newspaper-3/1/08)

2. [New Director for RIKEN's Brain Institute] Dr. Susumu Tonegawa, a Nobel Laureate in Physiology and Medicine and MIT professor, will become the Director of RIKEN's Brain Science Institute as of April 2009. At a press interview he said he would continue his research, stimulate other researchers, and bring in as many young researchers as possible from overseas as research group leaders. Dr. Ryoji Noyori, RIKEN's President and a Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, says that he expects Dr. Tonegawa's joining RIKEN will expedite Japan's S&T system reform. (Summary translation of an article in Nihon Keizai Newspaper – 3/28/08)

3. [International Symposium on iPS] An international symposium on Induced Pluripotent Stem Cell Research will be held on May 11-12 in Kyoto http://www.ips2008.jst.go.jp/index_e.html. The generation of human iPS cells was simultaneously reported by Prof. Yamanaka of Kyoto University and Prof. James Thomson of University of Wisconsin-Madison. The successful cellular reprogramming implies not only the method of generating pluripotent stem cells without using embryos, but also promises contributions to regenerative medicine, therapeutic cloning and more. The symposium reviews the generation of mouse and human iPS cells, and stem cell research leaders in the world will present their latest findings. (Summary of iPS Symposium Homepage)

4. [Shuttle Carries up Japanese Lab] Japanese astronaut Takao Doi who reached the ISS (International Space Station) via space shuttle Endeavour successfully installed Japanese Experiment Logistics Module's ("Kibo") Pressurized Section (ELM-PS) on ISS, using a robot arm. The ELM-PS, with 4.4-meter diameter and 4.2-meter length, contains experimental equipment. "Kibo" (meaning "hope") is the biggest experimental module on the ISS and its three sections will be installed on ISS through three trips to the station. Proposed by a Japanese boomerang champion, Astronaut Doi threw boomerang in the ISS and it successfully returned to him. (Compilation of articles on Nihon Keizai Newspaper, JAXA Homepage – 3/4-21)

5. [Training for University Presidents] In an effort to train university presidents to develop strong leadership skills, former company and university presidents have established a "University Top Management Leadership Program." It was proposed by Mr. Masao Honma, Vice President of Ritsumeikan University. Planned activities include lectures by experts and training of university top managers through role playing. To implement its activities they established the "Strategic University Management Research Institute." On March 22-23, they held a trial event for 11 university presidents and administrative department directors to listen to talks by key (Ministry of Education, S&T) officials and former university presidents. At a full event to be held in summer, more hands-on training is planned for participants, including a mock press conference on academic scandal cases.

This is a novel activity in Japan and expected to spread quickly. (Summary translation of an article in Asahi Newspaper – 3/31/08)

6. [School in Arab] Supported by METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry), Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) began discussion with UAE's (United Arab Emirates) Education authority on establishing APU's school in UAE. This is the first case that a Japanese university establishes a school in the Middle East. Keio University representatives joined the discussion, indicating Japanese universities' possible expansion into the Middle East. The discussion stems from the Abu Dhabi prince's expression of interest in Japanese education in his meeting with Japan's Prime Minister and METI minister. (Summary of an article in Nihon Keizai Newspaper – 3/26/08)

7. [JAUW International Fellowships] JAUW (Japanese Association of University Women) announced 2008 Fellowships for women: who are members of a national federation or association affiliated to IFUW (International Federation of University Women) or international members of IFUW; and are carrying out or would like to carry out independent research or advanced study at the post-graduate level in Japan. The fellowship provides Yen 500K-1M (~\$5-10K) per grantee, depending on the duration and other factors of the work. The deadline is April 20, 2008, and the details are on <http://www.jauw.org/shogaku/kokusai.htm>. (Summary of an article on the JAUW homepage)

Korea

8. [Woman to Become First South Korean in Space] South Korean female engineer, Yi So Yeon, will become the country's first person in space by going aboard a Russian spacecraft, after Moscow rejected Seoul's first choice because he violated reading rules at a training center. Yi will work aboard the International Space Station for about 10 days with five other cosmonauts, including one female American astronaut, conducting scientific experiments. The mission will make South Korea the world's 35th country and Asia's sixth to send an astronaut into space. Yi, currently employed by the Korea Aerospace Research Institute, earned both bachelor's and master's degrees in mechanical engineering at the state-run Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST). (Summary of an article in Japan Times – 3/11/08)

9. [S&T Foresight] South Korea's MOST (Ministry of S&T) released a scenario that describes Korea's future technology: On a day in 2030 a man who has been unconscious for the past 22 years wakes up to see a world where he can shake hands with a person in a distant location in ubiquitous society; cannot identify a man with physical disability because of wearable robot; and can communicate with anybody in the world thanks to an automatic translation machine. MOST

implements S&T foresights every five years and reflect the results on its S&T basic plans.

(Summary translation of an article on JST's Watcher – 3/7)

Indonesia

10. [Java Zoo Hatches Komodo Dragons] A zoo in Indonesia's second-largest city, Surabaya, has succeeded in hatching Komodo dragons, the largest living species of lizard, for a second time outside their natural habitat. Komodo dragons are found only in eastern Indonesia, on Komodo Island and several other islets in the Nusa Tenggara archipelago. Fourteen Komodo dragon eggs were hatched in incubators at the zoo in Surabaya on the main Java Island, bringing to 41 the number of the reptiles in their collection. (An article on Japan Times – 3/14/08)

Singapore

11. [Immunology Network] Singapore Immunology Network (SIgN) was officially launched on January 15, which is expected to support human immune research. SIgN will strengthen not only immunology research at research institute under A*STAR (Singapore S&T Agency), universities, and hospitals, but also promote cooperation and coordination between basic research and translational research. About 80 researchers are working at SIgN, established in Biopolis Phase II, focusing on cancer immunology, immune disorder, and infectious diseases. At the same time the Singapore Society of Immunology (SSI) was established. (Summary translation of an article on JST's Watcher – 3/17)

Australia

12. [International Science Linkages] The Australian Government's Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) issued a solicitation for the 2008 round of International Science Linkages (ISL) Competitive Grants. The grants will be made in specific fields with specific partner countries: Japan (Clean Energy); U.S. (Climate Change, Clean Energy, Advanced Computing, Nanotechnology); EU (Clean Energy, Life Science, Climate Change); U.K. (Climate Change, Water Resource, Clean Energy); Germany (Nanotechnology, Water Resource, Clean Energy); Brazil (Agriculture, Biotechnology, Mineral and Mining, Nanotechnology); and Singapore (Biotechnology). (Summary translation of an article in JST's Watcher – 2/28)