

Interview with Michiaki Kamo, CEO of LabBase

Basic Research Support Leads to Long-Term Business Sustainability

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

Curiosity is the font of science. Everyone must have had an experience of being intrigued by the wonder of science in childhood. Curiosity about the birth of space, how human beings emerged, or the secrets of humanoid robots, is important in promoting the development of science. The curiosity of scientists may not always appear to lead to practical outcomes, such as entrepreneurship or innovation, but it encompasses the seeds necessary for the development of human civilization.

Japan SPOTLIGHT's editor-in-chief happened upon a fascinating conference of young researchers, where they talked about their research as being motivated by curiosity. Since scientific research, depending on the case, can take a long time – even several generations – researchers need support with both finances and mentoring.

During the Edo Period (17th to 19th centuries in Japan), science in Japan, in particular mathematics, reached a high level. For example, the value of Pi was calculated to the 41st digit. Young mathematicians then in Japan occasionally had financial support from various people, including wealthy merchants, as well as gaining mentoring support from senior mathematicians. In the long run, such basic scientific support led to innovation and economic growth, and this is something that should be remembered.

The following interview is with Michiaki Kamo, the organizer behind this young basic researchers' conference.

(Interviewed on June 3, 2025)

Introduction

JS: Could you provide us with a short introduction of yourself, and then tell us how you started up this basic research support endeavor, plus your own experience prior to university studies and establishment of LabBase?

Kamo: I was originally thinking of becoming a mathematician, as my father was a game theory researcher. It was during my high school years that by chance I became aware of startups, with entrepreneurship as another way of life that could have a long-term impact. After entering the University of Tokyo, I heard many a researcher gripe about their selected career “hitting a wall”, funds running short and time being spent on miscellanies rather than focusing on research. I then realized that the Japanese research community faced problems with myriad issues requiring urgent answers, and without such solutions Japan would be in even more dire straits than today. Therefore, at age 21, I spotted a need for a platform to gain support for researchers – although my company, LabBase, was initially set up as a job matching service – established in 2016 under the name POL,



Michiaki Kamo

prior to the adoption of its current name – which targeted scientists and tech students.

JS: What LabBase activities are currently ongoing? In particular, why did you initiate Science Moves and hold the Pitch Conference under its auspices?

Kamo: Actually LabBase still is offering match-ups for researchers/students in applications fields with industries such as Information Technology, electro-tech and machinery as a cornerstone business. I launched Science Moves last year as an individual endeavor when I saw that the general public could not easily comprehend the difficult concepts being tackled by

researchers. Much effort is needed to understand the workings inside “Ivory Tower” environments, and thus they often become silos that are walled off. I recognized the fact that researchers must become empowered in order to gain support generally. My “personal push”, which I named Science Moves in hopes of turning it into a “foundation-like” platform, seeks to allow researchers to obtain advice and consulting assistance to make their work better known. It just so happened that LabBase provided the publicity and logistics

support for the Pitch Conference this time.

JS: What were the results of the Conference?

Kamo: We cannot evaluate the results yet, though I would maintain that a consensus exists for overall acceptance as generated by the simple messages emanating from the researchers. These should help improve the settings under which research groups conduct their activities. There's word about that today the basic research strength of Canada surpasses the once-vaunted Japanese prowess; surely this does not bode well for Japan's fortunes, not to mention the future of researchers and students now toiling in laboratories and schools here.

Japan's Educational System and Entrepreneurship

JS: For the Japanese economy to recover, it must let startups thrive, although not too many entrepreneurs can be found in Japan now. What do you think are the stumbling blocks to enhancing the status of entrepreneurs in Japan? How can the current ecosystem be altered to upgrade the situation? There are views that Japan's educational system caused this situation, but what is your perspective on this?

Kamo: Entrepreneurship must be fostered further in Japan, and the motivation to become entrepreneurs needs to be improved. Government, academia, commercial enterprises and society as represented by philanthropists plus even family members have to show more appreciation for the vital role played by entrepreneurs. More emphasis is needed not only in terms of policy and "seeding" but also on encouraging – financially, emotionally and otherwise – those taking on research challenges for whatever reason, whether out of intellectual curiosity, pursuit of fame, or altruistic motivation. The ecosystem in Japan cannot be changed if such backing is absent. Compartmentalized classrooms, formalized structures, and testing regimens with only the right answers being accepted while giving no leeway in educational objectives – these are inimical to pushing for innovation. A change in the mindset of those running Japan's educational system is definitely required for a paradigm shift.

Basic Research Unrelated to Business Is Crucial for Prosperity

JS: Regarding basic scientific research in Japan, can you provide us with your opinions? Without basic research surely no business yield from technology can be expected.

Kamo: Yes, the impetus behind Japan having attained an "advanced nation" status was the focus on the basics. When building a bridge, for example, the materials, the links, the structures all need to be handled properly. Strategy is key to a successful outcome. Benchmarking to foreign specifications that cannot be adjusted to match local requirements certainly means courting dangers.

JS: At a glance, some research may seem unrelated to business, but research can be turned into business seeds grounded only in a thorough understanding of the academic background, together with an outlook which can consider various potential applications. Specific funding is indispensable. Do you think such an intellectual support framework is feasible in Japan?

Kamo: Indeed I would say research is driven by the scientists' curiosity. It matters not if it is in the private or public (even military) sector. Pure motivations like the urge to learn and passion for discovery must be encouraged, not hampered by short-sighted restrictions. It is difficult to envisage the future of human inventiveness, to delineate the produce of science and technology. I meant to refer to the flux involved when I came up with the "Science Moves" moniker, in addition to referencing the power science exerts on our world and the lateral thinking it enables.

JS: When looking at the extended timespan and intergenerational work required, what kind of system will enable an enduring research effort to exist?

Kamo: I was drawn to entrepreneurship by the long-lived impact it generates. I think long-term goals that hold together an extended effort, grounded in communicable tenets and a shared purpose, will enable any research endeavor to endure. We need to display a "standard" depicting stability and hoist up a "Vision" which acts as common ground to attract collaborators.



Interview with Mr. Kamo by Japan SPOTLIGHT

JS: Basic research these days is often carried out internationally. What is your stance concerning research cooperation with overseas entities?

Kamo: In this globalized era, naturally I think international research cooperation is indispensable. This allows for the diversity we need to make research outputs universally acceptable. Obviously, success in the world market would help such research gain traction as well. For Science Moves and LabBase too, I would welcome international support.

JS: Not just support for natural sciences but also for social sciences such as economics is important, is it not? What do you think about the bifurcated status of natural science/engineering and humanities/social studies as found in Japan? Do you think this archaic scheme should be done away with?

Kamo: We need to break down such barriers. As noted earlier, there needs to be a common core in education, being a Liberal Arts scheme which encompasses Ethics and Literacy in the face of advances such as in Artificial Intelligence. Moreover, a familiarity with Culture, Philosophy and other “schools of thought” providing an understanding into human existence – History, Economics, Law – is needed. As an aside it is interesting that game theory covers mathematics and the physical sciences, in addition to ethics and even the socio-economic domain.

JS: As far as it can be made public, what future plans in support of basic research do you have in store?

Kamo: Issues like boundaries and generation gaps are the impetus behind LabBase being established: we offer boosts for youths displaying drive, as shown by bridging with elders while linking with overseas resources. This enables different viewpoints to be pooled and meets the desire to gain deep insights covering wide areas of interest. Within our purview is an interchange program with ASEAN researchers, for example. I myself earlier on participated in an internship in Singapore that gave me food for thought. I'm quite concerned about the downward spiral Japan is taking and wish to reverse the deterioration of basic scientific activities in this country. One future plan I have in mind is the establishment of a worldwide platform.

JS

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