

It is researchers' duty to cooperate for review process of applications to the Grants-in-Aid "

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One of my lasting memories is the strong emotion I felt when I found I was first granted a certain amount of the Grant-in-Aid through my first application to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). I felt that my idea was accepted by referees. Since then, this has been a significantly strong driving-force for me to extend my researches. I believe that numerous researchers have been fostered in the similar ways by the Grant-in-Aid of MEXT. Contrary to such a positive nature, a strange tide seems to have recently been spreading from non-academic society. These are based on arguments claiming not to increase but to restrain the amount of the Grant-in-Aid, because they are doubting that tax money is used for the grants, as they believe that grants are used for some pleasures of researchers. I think those arguments to be unreasonable and reckless. If we try to identify the types of researches (to be granted), it is not promising for us to find any resolution or settlement which can be accepted from any point of views. Under such a circumstance, I think that the categorization (originally in English) proposed by JSPS, i.e. "curiosity-driven researches" and "mission-oriented researches", are relatively plain and practical. But once we try to translate those two English categories into Japanese, those might be "researches driven by curiosities" and "researches to fulfill the clearly defined missions". Then the first one, which could be easily be transformed into "researches to gratify researchers' curiosities", might then easily be recognized as researches which researchers carry on as their pleasures. Contrary to this case, the second one could be easily accepted because of their clear targets. Therefore, I prefer not to recommend to translate those into Japanese. Based on this situation, I would really like to warn that we must to foster "curiosity-driven researches", and I am seriously worrying that, if not, no young people of our next generation will be born, who should take over not only sciences in Japan, but also society itself in Japan. This is my principle standpoint regarding the Grant-in-Aid.

In order for utilizing "the basic nature of the Grant-in-Aid" as I mentioned earlier, in an effective way, I would like to think about whether the current system is appropriate or not. The design of the system, at the beginning the then Ministry of Education and thereafter the MEXT had been so far cultivated/refined in cooperation with the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), has been refined through the years of their rendezvous, and for me, it seems to be an accurately organized, carefully revised "masterpiece". If I were to venture a bitter

pill of advice, it seems to me that as a result of prioritizing fairness to an excessive extent, the system tends to imposing a certain standard for applications to the Grant-in-Aid. It easily is imagined that such a system seems to result in rejection of more than 70% of applicants; then also may relate to discontents and complaints from rejectees made based on some speculations, as well as to slanders spread in the air. Considering such a background, I would like to suggest to introduce multifaceted criteria (to review the applications). For example, how about raising the selection ratio to 50-60% for young researchers who are applying for their first grants (although this way is opposing to that introduced in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the United States) and anyway letting them start their researches. This proposal might to be more appropriate if it introduces a certain process to check the level of progress/maturity of the researches by someone appropriate at any relevant time-frame. In the case where the progress is judged to be unsatisfactory, it would be appropriate to question their aptitudes as researchers. On the other hand, for researchers with recognizable world-level achievements, a special system might be put in place to ensure grant support over a given period of time. Of course, these ideas would face oppositions, so would not be that simple to implement. Even though, I dear to advise that we shall now call up our courage to implement such drastic "unfairness." Saying so may seem irresponsible, but unless such steps are taken, Japan is likely to lose its competitive edge to win in the global arena.

Speaking of global situation, there seems to be too many applications to provide sufficient review process to research grants worldwide. Many countries including the United States and Germany, are now planning to place some restrictions as eligibilities for grant applications. In this regard, JSPS has been keeping its considerable effort to gain cooperative contributions from researchers in the process of reviewing applications. If my recollection is correct, each application is scored by 4-6 reviewers, with each reviewer evaluating up to 150 applications. In order to conduct sufficient reviewing in each grant category and sub-category, more than 5,000 researchers must be mobilized. Though painful to believe, I heard that there are some researchers who receive grants with pleasures but unconcernedly give a blunt refusal on a request to review saying that they are too busy. On the other hand, as peculiar constraints embedded within the Japanese system cannot preclude "fairness" from its principle, it seems to be difficult to change the major framework of the current reviewing process. Under such circumstances, if the number of researchers who refuse their cooperation to "peer-review" works which is solemn duty of researchers increase in the future to an extent where sufficient reviewing process will not be secured, the program of the Grant-in-Aid itself will be collapsed. I, therefore, would like to reiterate here that researchers should recognize that their contribution toward the review process is our duty to accomplish. I believe that some system of restrictions should be applied to those who are unwilling to discharge this obligation. Though this proclamation may be viewed by some as rash, I am quite serious about it.