

Building International Membership

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One of the important aims of the WPI (World Premier International Research Center Initiative) that funds Kavli IPMU is to internationalize Japanese academia. Internationalization is a tricky concept. Science is global anyway. People do visit other countries for conferences, workshops, and collaborations. What exactly is needed here?

I moved to the United States back in 1993, and it surely wasn't an easy experience. How you look for a place to live, obtaining the social security number, opening bank accounts, getting credit cards, buying a car, everything was different. But I moved there because I felt there were more opportunities for me as a scientist. And I was very lucky. I met fantastic people, impressive collaborators, those who expanded my horizon, and wonderful friends. But there was one point that made my transition manageable: *I could speak English.*

When people think about moving to Japan, some people get scared because of the language barrier. In addition, living in the US, I see a lot more people from Europe than those from Japan, giving the impression that living in Japan may feel isolated.

WPI was designed to break this perception. Being at Kavli IPMU, everybody tells me that there is no difference being there from leading US or European institutions. We have about five hundred visitors from around the world every year. Every member *must* spend 1 to 3 months outside Japan. All the projects we are involved in are international. I believe scientifically, there is really no difference anymore.

And indeed more and more people we try to recruit find better scientific opportunities at Kavli IPMU than, ahem, US or Europe. But then, what about life and language?

This is where our support staffs come in. You can read about how we support our members and what we struggled with in a fascinating conversation by our three wonderful staff members. We are not perfect. But you can see how much we try and thrive to make feel everybody welcome to start their work as soon as they arrive. And it is working.

One great success example is our Associate Professor Simeon Hellerman on the cover. He moved from his position at Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton early on in the history of Kavli IPMU. And he became a great symbol of our international and top-level research center in the world.

