

Accelerating technology transfer from university to industry in Japan

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Since the passing of the University Technology Transfer Promotion Law in 1998, 16 technology licensing organizations have been established in Japan. CASTI, a corporation financed and supported by researchers of the University of Tokyo, is one of the first of these and has already succeeded in several licensing agreements. Through CASTI, the university's research will be utilized and developed in industry, and industry's experiences will, in turn, be fed back to the university.



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Introduction

Two years have passed since the University Technology Transfer Promotion Law came into effect in August 1998 to promote university-industry technology transfer in Japan. During this period, 16 technology licensing organizations (TLOs) were established throughout Japan with the approval of the Japanese Government. Several other proposals are under consideration.

Apart from TLOs, numerous universities and communities are beginning to actively promote university-industry technology transfer. There is a feeling that it is necessary to utilize the university as a key player to bring back the 10 years lost after the collapse of the bubble economy. Universities are necessary if Japanese society is to attain a vibrant 21st century. Some foreign countries used to joke about the low standing of Japanese universities. Someone said that "even though Japan does not

utilize its three main powers - universities, women and foreigners - it has been able to uphold its current industrial competitiveness."

Why is this so? Are research levels in Japanese universities so low that they cannot fulfil the expectations of the industrial community? Not true. Individual scientists working at the universities have shown achievements of high distinction and are certainly capable of competing internationally. Dr. Shirakawa received a Nobel Prize in 2000 for his discovery of conductive polymer. His achievement helped to restore lost confidence and stir new interest in Japan's academic and industrial community. Until now, there has been no method to properly manage the intellectual property created in universities. Probably, no proper licence agreements exist between the private sector and the university, or with Dr. Shirakawa, and it may be assumed that no royalties were really paid to the university, even though con