

Statement by the President of Science Council of Japan

To congratulate Professor Yoshinori Ohsumi on receiving  
the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine

18 October 2016

Dr. Yoshinori Ohsumi, Emeritus Professor at Tokyo Institute of Technology and the Member of Science Council of Japan (SCJ), has recently received the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. I would sincerely like to congratulate him. As the President of SCJ, I am very much proud that one of the incumbent Members of SCJ received such a great prize.

The prize was awarded because Professor Ohsumi discovered how the mechanism of “autophagy” works, in which cells break up their own protein components for recycling. When Professor Ohsumi started his study on autophagy, the research field drew less attention and was considered “challenging” because of the difficulties in observing the mechanism. However, Professor Ohsumi succeeded in observing autophagy processes of yeast in starvation using a microscope for the first time. Furthermore, Professor Ohsumi identified 14 genes related to the autophagy processes, and this has brought about tremendous progress in this research field.

As autophagy is now considered to be related to cancer and neurological disorders, among others, the outcome of Professor Ohsumi’s fundamental research could be applied to treatment and prevention of these diseases. The achievements of Professor Ohsumi, which include the aforementioned potential applications, are very significant.

I would like Professor Ohsumi to advance his research towards further achievements in the future, and to take the initiative in nurturing young scientists and in communicating with the society as well as and scientific community.

Nobel Prizes have been awarded to Japanese scientists for three consecutive years. This shows the world the high level of scientific research and thickness of high-qualified scientists in Japan. In order to continue to make such achievements in the future, it is important to concentrate on nurturing young scientists in order for them to have ambitious and creative minds, and to encourage a variety of researches to be expanded. Right after receiving of the Nobel Prize, Professor Ohsumi pointed out in a press conference the necessity of establishing a system, which can continuously help young scientists and support scientific activities with long-term perspective. We, SCJ, are strongly supportive of this idea.

SCJ, as the organization representing the Japanese scientists, will continue to make best efforts towards further advancement of sciences, helping the society understand and respect the usefulness and the meaning of various researches.

Takashi Onishi  
President  
Science Council of Japan