RIKEN

RIKEN Diversity Initiative

BDR Diversity Working Group

Mirai Alliance Uniting Women In Science

Mirai Alliance

ミライ アライアンス

Women in Life Sciences Mentorship Program

女性自然科学者メンターシッププログラム

Date: 2025/11/17
Time: 9:30 - 16:30
Avenue: RIKEN BDR Building C 1F Auditorium
場所：発生・再生研究棟C棟 オーディトリアム

対象者：女性の研究系職員（研究員、テクニカルスタッフ、修士課程学生、博士課程学生、ポスドク、若手研究者）

What is Mirai Alliance?

The Mirai Alliance is a mentorship network for women researchers in life sciences, launched by the BDR Diversity Working Group with support from the RIKEN Diversity Acceleration Fund. It connects early-career researchers with established women scientists, offering space for open conversation about research careers, work-life balance, and leadership. Through mentorship, community, and shared experience, Mirai Alliance supports women to grow with confidence and build sustainable, fulfilling scientific careers.

Program Aims

- Build **connections** between generations of women scientists.
- Encourage **open discussion** on challenges and opportunities in research careers.
- Provide **mentorship and resources** to navigate key career transitions.
- Promote **leadership, resilience, and visibility** of women in science.

- 世代を超えて女性研究者同士のつながりを築く。
- 研究キャリアにおける課題や機会について、率直に意見を交わす場をつくる。
- キャリアの転機を乗り越えるためのメンタリングとリソースを提供する。
- 女性研究者のリーダーシップ、レジリエンス（しなやかさ）、および可視性を高める。

Kick-off Symposium

Time	Session	Speakers & Details
09:30–09:35	Opening Remarks	Li-Kun Phng
09:35–11:05	**SESSION 1**	
09:35–10:05	Keynote Lecture: Beyond Role Models: Playing Your Own Role	**Mineko Kengaku**
10:05–10:20	Where to stand on a jungle gym	**Ai Niitsu**
10:20–10:35	The Journey to Independence: Building Vision, Identity and Network	**Aiko Sada**
10:35–11:05	Q&A／質疑応答 Anonymous questions welcome (英語・日本語). Scan QR code.	All Session-1 speakers.
11:15–13:45	**MENTOR–MENTEE DISCUSSIONS & LUNCH／交流と昼食**	Speed networking (Parts 1–4, 30 min each). Lunch during Part 2.
14:00–15:30	**SESSION 2**	—
14:00–14:15	The Benefits and Challenges of Scientific Mobility	**Li-Kun Phng**
14:15–14:30	Finding Confidence Beyond the Lab Bench: Lessons from Failure, Bias, and Belonging	**Yumi Konagaya**
14:30–14:45	Paths That Opened Through People and Persistence	**Chisako Sakuma**
14:45–15:00	Between Lab and Life: Seeking Balance in Science and Career	**Naoko Satoh-Takayama**
15:00–15:30	Q&A／質疑応答 Anonymous questions welcome (英語・日本語). Scan QR code.	All Session-2 speakers.
15:30–15:45	Closing Remarks	Yu-Chiun Wang

Scan for anonymous Q&A session

Meet the mentors

NAOKO SATOH-TAKAYAMA
RIKEN, IMS

CHISAKO SAKUMA
RIKEN, BDR

YUMI KONAGAYA
RIKEN, BDR

AIKO SADA
KYUSHU UNIVERSITY

LI-KUN PHNG
RIKEN, BDR

MINEKO KENGAKU
ICEMS, KYOTO UNIVERSITY

AI NIITSU
RIKEN, IMS

AYA TAKEOKA
RIKEN, CBS

MIKI EBISUYA
TU DRESDEN POL

HIROMI YANAGISAWA
TSUKUBA UNIVERSITY

FUMI KUBO
RIKEN, CBS

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Naoko Satoh-Takayama

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

ECL Unit leader (IMS)| 2024 - current| RIKEN

I study immune regulation and disease mechanisms in mucosal immunity.

ECL Unit Leader | RIKEN | 2024 - present

Public Relations Committee | Yokohama City University | 2025 - present

Reviewer | Japanese Society for Mucosal Immunology | 2025 - present

Associate Editor | Cellular and Molecular Life Sciences | 2023 - present

EDUCATION

PhD | Graduate School, The University of Tokyo
Specialized in mucosal immunology.

What expertise can you provide?
I find it difficult to identify a particular area of expertise, as I believe I still need to grow in all of these areas. I hope to learn and grow together with mentees by sharing my experiences and learning alongside the way.

What is your research area?
Mucosal immunology, immune homeostasis, inflammation, disease regulation

What stage of career are you at?
While I am still in the early stage of my research career, in terms of age and experience I may be closer to mid-career. Life events such as childbirth have shaped my career path in a unique way, leading to a slightly slower.

What sectors have you worked in?
My research career has been entirely within research institutes, including inter-university.

How do you manage work-related stress?
To manage work-related stress, I like to spend relaxing time with my family, often visiting a Japanese-style public bath (super sento). Enjoying meals together or having a drink with my husband helps me unwind and refresh my mind.

Fun fact about yourself
A fun fact about me is that I was four months pregnant when I started my position at RIKEN. It was both an exciting and memorable beginning to my career there.

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Chisako Sakuma

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

ECL Team Leader| 2025 - current| RIKEN

Using mosquitoes, we investigate neural and physiological mechanisms connecting feeding, metabolism, and reproduction.

Senior Scientist| 2024 - 2025| RIKEN BDR

Research Scientist| 2022 - 2024| RIKEN BDR

Lecturer / Assistant Professor| 2015 – 2022| Jikei University, School of Medicine

EDUCATION

PhD, MSc, BSc | School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Tokyo
Visiting Student | Department of Biology, Queen's University, Canada

What expertise can you provide?
Oral presentation
Grant Writing

What is your research area?
Neuroscience, blood-feeding behavior, mosquito physiology, reproduction

What stage of career are you at?
I consider myself a mid-career researcher. I have just started my own lab as a PI, and I am now in the process of recruiting members to join my team. I am eager to fully develop and expand the original research ideas that I have been aspiring to pursue.

What sectors have you worked in?
I have always been in academia and have never worked in other sectors. However, my husband is a researcher in industry, so through him I have some, though limited, understanding of how research is conducted in the private sector.

How do you manage work-related stress?
Spending time with my family—especially with my children—allows me to completely disconnect from work for a while and reset my mind. At the same time, parenting itself comes with constant challenges, so immersing myself in research helps me relieve the stress that comes from that side as well.

Fun fact about yourself
I love eating! I think my passion for food and the joy of sharing meals have been one of my biggest sources of motivation in many aspects of my life.

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https://sites.google.com/view/yumi-konagaya-lab-en/home?authuser=0

X @YumiKonagaya

How do you manage work-related stress?
Relax at home and spending time with family and friends.

Fun fact about yourself
I tend to speak a little too fast - that's my Osaka accent showing!

Yumi Konagaya

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Team Director| 2024 - current| RIKEN BDR

My lab aims to quantitatively understand how cell proliferation is tightly regulated during intestinal epithelial stem cell differentiation to maintain tissue homeostasis.

Postdoctoral Fellow | 2020 - 2023| Weill Cornel Medicine, USA

Postdoctoral Fellow | 2019 - 2020| Stanford University, USA

EDUCATION

PhD | 2019 | Graduate School of Biostudies,Kyoto University
Supervisor: Prof. Michiyuki Matsuda
Project: Development of FRET-based reporter of AMPK transgenic mouse reveals tissue- and cell-type specific activation of AMPK in vivo.
BSc | 2014| Department of Biological Sciences, Kyoto University

What expertise can you provide?
Oral presentation
Publishing
Writing CV

What is your research area?
My current research focuses on understanding cell fate decisions in the intestinal epithelium using quantitative biology approaches.

What stage of career are you at?
Early-career

What sectors have you worked in?
I have worked exclusively in academia.

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Aiko Sada

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Professor |Medical Institute of Bioregulation, Kyushu University | 2023 - present

Epidermal stem cell dynamics in skin regeneration and aging

Associate professor | IRCMS, Kumamoto university | 2019 - 2023

Assistant professor | TARA, University of Tsukuba | 2016 - 2019

Postdoctoral fellow | Cornell University, USA | 2011 – 2016

EDUCATION

PhD | 2011 | The Graduate University For Advanced Studies (Sokendai)

Supervisor: Dr. Yumiko saga

BSc | 2006 | Shizuoka university

How do you manage work-related stress?
Spending time with family, maintaining sleep & health, and having supportive colleagues.

Fun fact about yourself
Fell asleep in lab meetings when I was a student, but I still made it in academia 😊.

What expertise can you provide?

Oral presentation
Writing CVs
Grant writing
Networking

What is your research focus?
Cellular and molecular mechanisms of skin regeneration and aging.

What stage of career are you at?
Mid-career

What sectors have you worked in?
Academia only

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Li-Kun Phng

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Team Director| 2016 - current| RIKEN CDB/BDR

My lab unravels the cellular and mechanical principles of how blood vessels are formed into well-patterned networks.

Postdoctoral Fellow | 2014 - 2016| National Cerebral & Cardiovascular Research Center, Osaka

Postdoctoral Fellow | 2011 - 2014| VIB & KU Leuven, Belgium

Postdoctoral Fellow | 2009 – 2011| EMBL Heidelberg, Germany

Visiting Scientist | 2009| Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt, Germany

EDUCATION

PhD | 2009 | University College London, England
Supervisor: Dr. Holger Gerhardt
Thesis: Notch signalling in developmental angiogenesis

MSc by Research in Life Sciences | 2004 | University of Edinburgh, Scotland

BSc in Pharmacology with Study in Industry | 2002| University of Bristol, England

What expertise can you provide?

Oral presentation
Publishing
Writing CV
Working abroad
Networking

How do you manage work-related stress?

Moms' night out, a drink after work, boxing (works without fail!).

Fun fact about yourself

I have studied or worked in 8 countries but only mastered 1 language ☹.

What is your research area?

Endothelial cell mechanobiology, vascular patterning, tubulogenesis, tissue morphogenesis, zebrafish.

What stage of career are you at?

Mid-career.

What sectors have you worked in?

Academia and 1 year in Novartis (Basel, Switzerland) as an internship student.

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Mineko Kengaku

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Professor | iCeMS, Kyoto University | 2017 - Present

Professor | iCeMS | 2012 - 2017

Assistant Professor | iCeMS | 2008 - 2012

Team Leader | RIKEN | 2004 - 2008

Lecturer | Kyoto University | 2002 – 2003

Assistant Professor | Kyoto University | 1997 -2001

Postdoctoral Research Fellow | Harvard Medical School, USA | 1995 – 1997

Cliff Tabin Lab

EDUCATION

PhD | 1995 | University of Tokyo
MSc | 1991 | University of Tokyo
BSc | 1989 | University of Tokyo

How do you manage work-related stress?

Wearing favourite clothes, watching sports, cooking and eating, traveling

What expertise can you provide?

Grant writing
Writing CV
Oral presentations

What is your research area?
cell motility during brain development

What stage of career are you at?
senior (starting second career after kids)

What sectors have you worked in?
academia only

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Ai Niitsu

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Team Director | 2025 - current | RIKEN, BDR

We design membrane proteins to study sequence–structure–function relationships and mechanisms of signal transduction.

Special Postdoctoral Researcher | 2021 – 2022 | RIKEN, JSPS

Special Postdoctoral Researcher | 2017 – 2021 | RIKEN, CBD

Special Postdoctoral Researcher | 2016 – 2017 | RIKEN Center for Life Systems Science

Postdoctoral Fellow | University of Bristol, United Kingdom
Postdoctoral Fellow | RIKEN, Japan

EDUCATION

PhD | University of Tokyo, Japan

How do you manage work-related stress?
Weekend getaway to the countryside.

Fun fact about yourself
Anything folded (knitting, origami, and proteins) attracts me!

What expertise can you provide?

Oral presentation
Writing CVs
Grant writing
Publishing
Going abroad

What is your research focus?
Cellular and molecular mechanisms of skin regeneration and aging.

What stage of career are you at?
I'd say early-career.

What sectors have you worked in?
Academia only

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Aya Takeoka

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Team Director | 2024 – present | RIKEN, CBS

Focuses on **neural circuit mechanisms of motor control**, aiming to define spinal circuit logic and translate discoveries toward recovery after stroke or spinal cord injury.

Principal Investigator | 2016 – 2024 | NERF, VIB / KU Leuven, Belgium

Postdoctoral Fellow | 2010 – 2016 | FMI, Basel, Switzerland

EDUCATION

PhD | 2004 – 2010 | University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), USA
B.A.| 1999 – 2003 | Neuroscience (High Honors), Oberlin College, USA

What expertise can you provide?

Writing CVs
Grant writing
Publishing
Oral presentation
Leadership

What is your research focus?
Neural circuit mechanisms underlying motor control, including how spinal neurons select, execute, and link elemental movements, and how circuits adapt during recovery after injury.

What stage of career are you at?
Mid-career

What sectors have you worked in?
I have always been in academia and never worked in other sectors.

How do you manage work-related stress?
Wine 😊. I picked up salsa dancing when I was a PhD student at UCLA, and that love remained one of the important things that helped me unwind for years. Now that I am a solo parent of a 2-year-old girl, I do not get as much personal time, but I unwind by reading books to her and cuddling her. And did I mention wine? 😊

Fun fact about yourself:
I once set a goal to learn something new every month, so I have tried everything from beginner watercolor painting to making fresh pasta. I have not been great at any of them yet, but I love exploring new skills and hobbies.

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Miki Ebisuya

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Professor / Chair of Cell & Tissue Control | 2023–present | Physics of Life, TU Dresden, Germany

Quantitative cross-species comparison using the stem cell zoo.

Group Leader | 2018 – 2023 | EMBL Barcelona, Spain

Unit Leader | 2013 – 2019 | RIKEN, CDB

Group Leader, Career-Path Promotion Unit | 2009 – 2013 | Kyoto University, Japan

JSPS Research Fellow | 2005 – 2008 | JSPS

EDUCATION

PhD | Kyoto University, Japan

How do you manage work-related stress?
Taking a long bath, going for a walk while listening to an audiobook, buying lots of manga at once.

Fun fact about yourself:
I do Radio Taiso exercise every morning – it's the only exercise I can remember.

What expertise can you provide?
Grant writing
Chalk Talks)

What is your research focus?
Cross-species comparative developmental biology using pluripotent stem cells ("stem cell zoo") to dissect how species-specific developmental tempos and morphologies emerge from shared cellular and molecular principles.

What stage of career are you at?
Mid-career/Senior

What sectors have you worked in?
Academia only

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Hiromi Yanagisawa

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Director & Professor | 2024 – present | TARA, University of Tsukuba

We aim to elucidate the molecular mechanism underlying extracellular matrix-related diseases.

Professor | 2015 – present | TARA Center, University of Tsukuba

Associate Professor (Tenured) | 2011 – 2015 | UTSW, USA

Assistant Professor / PI | 2003 – 2011 | UTSW, USA

Instructor | 1999 – 2003 | UTSW, USA

Postdoctoral Researcher | 1991 – 1999 | UTSW, USA

Clinical Doctor (Internal Medicine Resident) | 1986 – 1991 | University of Tsukuba Hospital

EDUCATION

PhD | Medical Sciences | 1993 | University of Tsukuba

M.D. | 1986 | University of Tsukuba

What stage of career are you at?
Senior

What sectors have you worked in?
only in academia

How do you manage work-related stress?
Talking to spouse, cooking for my family, exercise, traveling, eating good foods

Fun fact about yourself:
I have a special talent for forgetting things when I travel. One time, I left my boarding pass at the kiosk and got called out at the airport.

What expertise can you provide?

grant writing
Publishing
writing CV
Networking
oral presentation
working abroad
leadership

What is your research focus?
Molecular mechanisms of extracellular matrix (ECM)–related diseases, including how ECM components regulate tissue structure, vascular integrity, and disease progression.

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Fumi Kubo

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Team Director | 2024 – present | RIKEN, CBS

My lab studies the neural circuit mechanisms by which sensory inputs produce goal-directed behavioral outputs.

Associate Professor | 2018 – 2024 | National Institute of Genetics (NIG), Japan

Project Leader (W2) | 2015 – 2017 | Max Planck Institute of Neurobiology, Martinsried, Germany

Postdoctoral Research Fellow | 2010 – 2014 | University of California, San Francisco, USA & Max Planck Institute of Neurobiology, Martinsried, Germany

Special Postdoctoral Fellow | 2007 – 2010 RIKEN, Japan (Wako)

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Biology | 2007 | Kyoto University
M.Sc. in Biology | 2004 | Kyoto University
B.A. in Biology | 2002 | Kyoto University

How do you manage work-related stress?
Spending time with my family, getting a good sleep, and taking care of plants (orchids are my favorite).

Fun fact about yourself:
I can sleep anywhere… planes, trains, or even standing up!

What expertise can you provide?
Grant Writing
Writing CV
Oral Presentations

What is your research focus?
Neural circuit mechanisms underlying how sensory inputs are transformed into purposeful behaviors, with an emphasis on circuit logic, computation, and behaviorally relevant neural coding.

What stage of career are you at?
mid-career

What sectors have you worked in?
Academia only

Alliance & Support
ミライアライアンスの今後と支援

Slack Community スラックコミュニティ
- Join our private Slack workspace to stay connected.
- Share resources, questions, and opportunities.
- Celebrate achievements and exchange advice.

Slack Channel

Quarterly Mentorship Zoom Sessions 定期オンラインセッション
- 4 times a year with guest speakers and peer discussions.
- Topics: career strategy, leadership, communication.
- Hybrid or virtual participation welcomed.
- Zoom link to be shared later.

Contact & Support お問い合わせ・サポート
- Organized by BDR Diversity Working Group.
- Contact: bdr_diversity_po@ml.riken.jp
- Follow-up announcements via email & Slack.

Connecting women in science to build

a brighter future together

「科学で未来をつなぐ女性たちへ」