



BDR Diversity  
Working  
Group



Mirai  
Alliance  
Uniting  
Women  
In  
Science

# Mirai ミライ アライアンス Alliance

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  
オーデトリウム

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.
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- 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	<b>SESSION 1</b>	
09:35–10:05	Keynote Lecture: Beyond Role Models: Playing Your Own Role	<b>Mineko Kengaku</b>
10:05–10:20	Where to stand on a jungle gym	<b>Ai Niitsu</b>
10:20–10:35	The Journey to Independence: Building Vision, Identity and Network	<b>Aiko Sada</b>
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	<b>MENTOR–MENTEE DISCUSSIONS &amp; LUNCH／交流と昼食</b>	Speed networking (Parts 1–4, 30 min each). Lunch during Part 2.
14:00–15:30	<b>SESSION 2</b>	—
14:00–14:15	The Benefits and Challenges of Scientific Mobility	<b>Li-Kun Phng</b>
14:15–14:30	Finding Confidence Beyond the Lab Bench: Lessons from Failure, Bias, and Belonging	<b>Yumi Konagaya</b>
14:30–14:45	Paths That Opened Through People and Persistence	<b>Chisako Sakuma</b>
14:45–15:00	Between Lab and Life: Seeking Balance in Science and Career	<b>Naoko Satoh-Takayama</b>
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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[https://www.riken.jp/en/research/labs/ecl/precis\\_immune\\_reg\\_riken\\_ecl/index.html](https://www.riken.jp/en/research/labs/ecl/precis_immune_reg_riken_ecl/index.html)

# 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.

### 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.

### 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.



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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**

### 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.

### 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.



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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 Cornell 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, University of Tokyo**

### **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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### 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 😊.

# 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**

### 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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### 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 😞.

# 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 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**

**Associate 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 having kids)

## What sectors have you worked in?

Academia only



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## Ai Niitsu

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Team Director | 2025 – current | RIKEN, IMS

Team Leader | 2024 – 2025 | RIKEN, BDR

PRESTO researcher | 2022 – | RIKEN, CPR

JSPS RPD | 2021 – 2022 | RIKEN, CPR

SPDR | 2017 – 2021 | RIKEN, CPR

Postdoctoral Researcher | 2016 – 2017 | RIKEN QBiC

Research Associate | 2012 – 2016 | University of Bristol, United Kingdom

### EDUCATION

PhD | 2012 | University of Tokyo

MSc | 2009 | University of Tokyo

BSc | 2007 | University of Tokyo

#### 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?

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

#### What stage of career are you at?

I'd say early-career.

#### What sectors have you worked in?

Academia only



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### 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.

# Aya Takeoka

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Team Director | 2024 – present | RIKEN, CBS**

My research 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.



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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 to 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.

# Code of Conduct

## 行動規範



### Confidentiality and Privacy

All information shared between mentors and mentees should be treated as confidential unless explicitly agreed otherwise. Both parties must respect the privacy of discussions and refrain from sharing personal details or sensitive information with others outside the mentoring relationship. Both mentors and mentees are expected to maintain this trust throughout and beyond the duration of the mentoring relationship, recognizing that confidentiality is foundational to creating a safe space for honest dialogue and growth.

### 守秘義務とプライバシー

メンター、メンティー間で共有される全ての情報は、明確な合意がない限り機密情報として扱ってください。双方は、メンタリングの場以外で他者と個人情報や機密情報を共有することを控え、議論におけるプライバシーを尊重する必要があります。メンターとメンティーの両者は、メンタリング期間中およびその後もこの守秘義務を維持することが求められます。守秘義務は、率直な対話と成長のための安全な空間を作り出すための基盤であることをご認識ください。

### Management of Unpublished Research Data

In the event that a mentee wishes to share unpublished data with a mentor to obtain scientific advice, the BDR Diversity WG:

- Requests that the mentee first obtain permission from their thesis supervisor
- Requests that the mentor maintain strict confidentiality of all shared research data

This approach ensures that intellectual property is protected and supervisory relationships are respected while enabling meaningful mentorship conversations.

### 未発表研究データの管理

メンティーがメンターと未発表データを共有して科学的助言を得たい場合、BDRダイバーシティワーキンググループは以下の2点を遵守するよう要請します。

- メンティーは、自身の研究指導者から事前に許可を得ること。
- メンターは、共有された全ての研究データについて守秘義務を厳守すること。

この取り組みは、知的財産を保護し指導関係を尊重しながら有意義なメンタリングを実現します。

Connecting women in science to build  
a brighter future together

「科学で未来をつなぐ女性たちへ」

