

Remarks by H.E. Mr. HAYASHI Hajime,
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,
at the ERATO UK-Japan Joint Symposium on Circadian Rhythms and Sleep,
at the University of Oxford
on 11th March 2024

Professors, Doctors,
Distinguished Guests,

It is my great pleasure to have been given the opportunity to attend this ERATO UK-Japan Joint Symposium on Circadian Rhythms and Sleep today. May I first express my sincere appreciation to the organising committee, including Prof. Russell Foster, Prof. Vladyslav Vyazovskiy, Associate Prof. Aarti Jagannath, and Prof. Hiroki Ueda, and everyone else whose efforts have made this groundbreaking event possible.

Being encircled by so many renowned experts of science and medical affairs in this field, I feel rather hesitant to go into today's topic. However, I would like to start with my own individual experiences. Thinking back, it was when I was in the U.S. as a fellow at the International Affairs Research Center of Harvard University from 2007 to 2008 that I learned a little about the existence of sleep research. I clearly remember an advertisement on the underground trains in Boston with a title "Why don't you test your sleep?", and was a bit inclined to apply to be a volunteer to test something like the relationship between sleeping conditions and insomnia, then recruited by the Massachusetts General Hospital. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I did not apply in the end, but at that time I believed that this field was still in its infancy. So I am fascinated now to see that this cutting-edge research has become a significant opportunity for new international collaboration, in particular, between Japan and the UK. This is because I believe that the study of sleep is a very important and most timely topic for addressing some of the social problems that people face today.

As you may know, Japan has one of the shortest average sleep durations among the OECD countries. In 2017, the word "sleep debt", a term closely related to lack of sleep, was nominated for Japan's New Word of the Year award. People in Japan are often described by those outside as being diligent, and if this is so, it is important that we extend this diligence to include research into sleep.

I understand that the UK is now not only a world leader in sleep research at the molecular and cellular level, but also in epidemiological research. Considering that sleep rhythms are at the very core of our social activities, the importance of epidemiological research on human society is indisputable.

And looking more widely, Japan and the UK recognise the vital importance of science, technology and innovation in deepening cooperation. We are working together in fields such as biotechnology and medicine, semiconductors, space, artificial intelligence, and quantum technology, and the Japanese government is encouraging such collaboration through the UK-Japan Joint Committee on Science and Technology.

I can imagine about one third of our time is spent asleep. Therefore, sleep is definitely of great significance to human health and lifestyles, and we recognise that this research is very meaningful from both a medical and a scientific perspective. I have great expectations that this symposium will deepen our cooperation in these fields, as well as providing vital support for research and encouraging a greater exchange of knowledge and information between our countries for the benefit of human beings.

The United Kingdom, and especially the University of Oxford, has deep ties with Japan, and it was here at Oxford that Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan studied. With this in mind, I am delighted that this symposium is being held here at the University of Oxford.

Once again, I would like to thank everyone involved in this ERATO UK-Japan joint symposium. This is the first time that such a symposium has been held, but I am confident that the discussions over the next three days will lead to more diverse sleep research cooperation between Japan and the UK and even beyond.

Last but not least, as we all do our best to stay healthy, let's make sure we are all getting good sleep each night!

Thank you very much indeed.