# Computer Science in Japanese Universities[1]

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February 24, 1993

[1] *IEEE Computer*, 1993, to appear.

**Abstract**

This paper presents some impressions of computer science in Japanese universities based on the authors' sabbatical visits. The focus is primarily on such structural aspects of the discipline as departmental organization, faculty and student populations, funding, research activity, and computing facilities. Perhaps the key observation is that Japanese cultural practices influence the way in which computer science is approached in Japanese universities to a larger degree than might be imagined.

**Key words**: Japanese universities, computer science, cultural influences.

# 1 Introduction

Despite the association of Japan with high technology, most Western scientists know little about computer science in Japan. Many factors contribute to this phenomenon, including language and cultural differences, a shortage of readily available information, and a degree of technical chauvinism. The problem is aggravated by a general lack of the kind of widespread long-term individual contacts between computer scientists that one often sees, for example, between researchers in Europe and those in the U.S. This remains the case despite concerted efforts both inside and outside of Japan to increase scientific exchange through various government initiatives.

In this paper, we attempt to address part of the problem by presenting some impressions of computer science in Japanese universities. Our goal is to provide an informal portrait of the discipline as practiced within universities in Japan in the hopes that this will lead to enhanced awareness and increased interaction. In painting this portrait, our focus is primarily on what might be called "structural aspects" of computer science in Japan. Rather than describing the specifics of computer science coursework or research projects, we instead attempt to highlight the way in which computer science is organized and pursued in universities. This is not a systematic or complete survey, but instead a collection of informal, but perhaps still enlightening, observations. This paper can also be viewed as augmenting and updating earlier papers on computer science research in Japan [Kim83, Sto84]; although some of our observations agree with points made in those papers, it is evident that the discipline has evolved in the intervening years. Finally, given that we were visitors and hence isolated from much of the inner workings of Japanese universities, these views are necessarily those of outsiders. We apologize in advance for any misconceptions we may promulgate, and thank our Japanese colleagues for sharing much of the information contained in this paper.

# 2 Japanese Universities

The major public universities in Japan are sponsored by the national government. Among these, the general consensus is that the top-tier consists of The University of Tokyo, Kyoto University, Osaka University, Nagoya University, Kyushu University, Hokkaido University, and Tohoku University. In the engineering disciplines, Tokyo Institute of Technology is often added to this list as well. There are also many private universities, with the two best known being Keio University and Waseda University. Computer science is well-represented at all of these schools, as well as many others.

The Japanese university system is distinguished in part by the strong central control exercised by the

Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture (*Monbush$\bar{o}$*). *Monbush$\bar{o}$* provides the primary funding for both teaching and research at national universities, and also regulates staffing levels, salaries, degree programs, numbers of students, building construction and maintenance, etc. *Monbush$\bar{o}$* also has significant control over private universities, despite their lack of formal government affiliation.

As a discipline, computer science tends to be strongest at the eight top-tier national universities and a few of the private universities, notably Keio. In addition, several new programs related to computer science have recently been initiated despite *Monbush$\bar{o}$*'s generally conservative bent. One is Keio University's Environmental Information Engineering program, which emphasizes the integration of computers with daily life. Two others are the newly created Japan Advanced Institutes for Science and Technology (JAIST), funded by *Monbush$\bar{o}$* with support from industry and local government. These institutes are oriented exclusively towards graduate education and research, a significant departure from the current educational structure in Japan.

The primary faculty ranks in Japanese universities are *joshu*, *k$\bar{o}$shi*, *joky$\bar{o}$ju*, and *ky$\bar{o}$ju*. The literal translation of *joshu* is "assistant", but the position is perhaps more akin to a postdoctoral or research associate position in a U.S. university in its duties rather than an Assistant Professor. Although a *joshu* is technically not a faculty member, the holder does gain tenure upon initial appointment. In general, *joshu* hold doctorates[1] either on appointment or soon after. *K$\bar{o}$shi*, *joky$\bar{o}$ju* and *ky$\bar{o}$ju* are usually translated as Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and (Full) Professor, respectively, although the equivalences to the American ranks are not exact. In practice, the *k$\bar{o}$shi* rank is used infrequently in comparison to the other three ranks.

Unlike the U.S., each department in Japan is further divided into relatively autonomous laboratories or "chairs" known as *k$\bar{o}$za*, with six being the standard number of *k$\bar{o}$za* per department at top-tier national universities. This additional administrative level, which is based on the German educational model, tends to give a department a much different character than that typically found in the U.S. This difference comes from the laboratory serving as the focus of much of the intellectual and social activity rather than the department, and is magnified by the greater relative importance placed on the group in Japanese culture.

Each laboratory is headed by a full professor. The *ky$\bar{o}$ju* acts not only as the administrative head of the unit, performing many of the same functions as a department head in the U.S. system, but also as the leader who sets the tone and style of the laboratory. In this latter capacity, he—and they are virtually, if not literally,

[1] Many Japanese programs grant D.Eng. or D.Sc. degrees instead of Ph.D.s. They also grant "paper doctorates" to industrial scientists and engineers based on papers published over the years.

all male—serves as a mentor to the other members of the laboratory, including junior faculty, graduate students, and advanced undergraduate students. This role even extends to the point of being responsible for finding positions for graduating students. Consistent with Japanese culture, this control is exerted to turn the laboratory into a cohesive group in which individual achievements are downplayed and overall productivity is stressed.

The number of people associated with a laboratory varies, but is usually specified to be within a fairly narrow range by *Monbush* $\bar{o}$ and university rules. Most commonly and traditionally, a laboratory in a top-tier national university has one *ky* $\bar{o}$*ju*, the chair holder, one *joky* $\bar{o}$*ju* or one *k* $\bar{o}$*shi*, and two *joshu*. The number of students is also proscribed by a formula based on the number of faculty in the laboratory and their rank. For example, a full professor may be restricted to one post-M.S. doctoral student per year, for an average of three at any given time; numbers for junior faculty are correspondingly fewer. It is not clear to what degree these guidelines are enforced.

The normal staff for a laboratory is quite small, consisting of perhaps a single secretary. The services of this person may even be divided among the personnel of two or more laboratories at some universities. Of particular note is that, unlike many research-oriented computer science departments in the U.S., there are usually no technical support staff, even at the top-tier Japanese universities. The duties that one would associate with such a position elsewhere are handled by the *joshu* and graduate students as a matter of course. The relative lack of staff support has also been noted in Japanese government laboratories doing work in computer science [Kah90].

Each laboratory is associated with a given subject area, which is the formal focus of the research performed by its members. For example, the chairs in the Department of Information and Computer Sciences at Osaka University include such areas as Programming Languages, Computing Mechanisms, and Intelligent Information Engineering. As can be seen from these examples, topic areas are very generally drawn; indeed, the correlation between the title and the actual work done in the laboratory is frequently small. One implication of this is that the degree to which the research within a laboratory is actually coordinated or focused on a more narrow area can vary widely. For example, in some laboratories, all faculty and students work on one project or a collection of closely related projects; in others, a junior faculty member may be more free to pursue his own interests, which may in fact be very different from that of the chair holder. Which model is followed seems to depend mostly on the style of the chair holder, with a secondary influence being the tradition at the university.

The prevalence of the *k* $\bar{o}$*za* system within Japanese universities has some interesting ramifications. One

is that it enhances the role of the full professor relative to a person of similar seniority in a non-*kōza* system. For example, as the head of a *kōza*, a professor has many of the powers and responsibilities usually associated with department chairman elsewhere, including control over financial resources, computing equipment, etc. This modified role is, of course, a mixed blessing, since along with the increased authority typically goes an increased administrative workload. The prestige associated with the post also means that the individual is also expected to serve on numerous Faculty, University, and government advisory panels, hold posts in Japanese professional organizations, etc. Compared to full professors in U.S. universities, these responsibilities are extraordinarily hard to avoid.

Perhaps a more serious consequence is that the *kōza* system tends to narrow the focus of the laboratory's members. For example, research collaboration between members of different laboratories is rare at many universities, and even formal social activities tend to be associated with a single laboratory. While this has the positive effect of allowing more time for in-depth investigations of the given subject area, it also means that there is less collaboration and interaction with other members of the department than is common at U.S. universities. The net result is that there is somewhat less breadth of vision, especially among students, than there would be in the case of a typical U.S. department. It can be argued, however, that this potential problem is lessened because the Japanese seem less plagued by the NIH (Not Invented Here) syndrome. That is, they are perhaps less likely to be aware of a key concept or technology, but when they learn about it, they are far more likely to take full advantage of it.

*Monbushō* sometimes allows new universities to change or eliminate the traditional *kōza* structure. Perhaps the best-known of these is the University of Tsukuba in Japan's "science city" north of Tokyo. There, instruction and research are administratively separate, with the latter being performed in 26 research institutes, including the Institute of Information Sciences and Electronics where computer science research is done. This program is also of interest because it caters in part to students returning to school after having worked for a number of years. This notion, which is very common in the U.S., is an entirely new concept in Japan. Returning, older students at the University of Tsukuba present an interesting problem in the Japanese language. Students address professors using a polite form of Japanese; similarly, younger people address older people with the same polite form. When an older student addresses a younger faculty member—a previously unheard of situation in Japan—a conflict arises that is difficult to resolve.

## 3 Faculty Career Paths

Faculty positions are filled differently from the American system. In particular, open competition is rare in practice since full professors have nearly complete control over who they hire. Appointments and promotions to different ranks must be approved at various levels ranging from the department to *Monbush¯o*. It would be extremely rare, however, for the recommendation of a full professor to be overturned. One reason is that each full professor is considered to be autonomous; another is that overturning a decision would cause severe embarrassment to the full professor, an action that is to be avoided at almost all costs in Japan; and a final reason is that, in part to avoid embarassment, the full professor will generally take responsibility to discuss the potential appointment or promotion at great length with other faculty members, who could make any concerns known far earlier than during any formal vote. These last two reasons, of course, hold true in the American system; however, the degree to which they hold differs significantly.

In general, professors select their own former students for openings. Often, these individuals are already in a more junior position in the laboratory, resulting, for instance, in promotion from *joshu* to *jokyo¯ju*. In other cases, a full professor might hire a former student who currently holds a position at another university. If such a student is at a lesser university, then they can be kept at the same level; for instance, a *jokyo¯ju* at any university in the country can be brought into The University of Tokyo as a *jokyo¯ju*. If such a student is moving to a lesser university, this decrease in prestige must be compensated with a promotion, for instance from *joshu* to *jokyo¯ju*. Indeed, the *ko¯shi* position exists largely to add flexibility in this dimension, permitting moves to "lesser" universities with a compensating promotion to *jokyo¯ju*.

Full professor positions open when people retire, die, or move to a full professorship at their home (and usually more prestigious) university. When such a position does open, it is common for the associate professor to be promoted. The other most likely candidates are those originally from the laboratory who hold positions in other universities or in other laboratories at the same university. Full professorships are also created when new laboratories are created, something that has happened relatively frequently in the recent past in computer science. New laboratories are filled top-down. That is, the full professor is hired first, then the junior positions are filled under the full professor's control.

It is not unusual for a position, especially a full professorship, to be filled with a person from industry. As with the other situations, the person who is hired is almost always a former student from the hiring university. In contrast to the U.S., where movement from university to industry is significantly more common than from industry to university, in Japan movement of faculty from academia to industry is exceptionally rare.

The ramifications of these approaches to appointing and promoting faculty is that inbreeding is significantly higher, in general, in Japan than in the U.S. At the student level as well, the best undergraduates are kept on as graduate students and the best graduate students are kept as *joshu* or sent to other laboratories or universities from which they can later return. Indeed, when one of us gave an informal presentation comparing computer science undergraduate and graduate student life in Japan and America, it was stressed that most U.S. departments and faculty encourage their best students to go elsewhere for both graduate school and also initial faculty positions. One question from the Japanese audience was, "Why do you do that?" The focus on the promotion of the "group," in this case the home laboratory and university, is so strong in Japan that the potential benefits of exposure to other people and ideas is not considered as important as in the U.S.

Other noticeable differences between American departments and Japanese laboratories include the near total absence of women and foreigners as faculty members. Our informal observations made it clear that the percentage of women in faculty positions is far less than the 10% figure commonly cited for U.S. computer science departments. This is not likely to change significantly at least in the short- and medium-range future, in part because there also appear to be very few Japanese women who have received or are about to receive a doctorate in computer science in Japan. Also, there are no affirmative action programs and no societal or university pressures to increase the number of women (or minorities), as in the U.S. As for foreign faculty, there are very few in Japanese universities other than visitors such as ourselves. In fact, one report noted that, as of 1989, there were seven non-Japanese tenured faculty in any discipline whatsoever at all national universities in Japan [Gel90].

A final difference between U.S. and Japanese professorships is compensation. In Japan, all faculty in all disciplines and at all national universities are paid on the same schedule that takes into account both rank and time of service. Although making comparisons is difficult due to differences in tax laws and benefits, our estimate is that computer science faculty of equivalent rank and seniority effectively earn perhaps a third less in Japan than in the U.S. In addition, consulting is officially prohibited in Japan, in contrast to the U.S. The smaller earnings is compensated for at least in part by the high prestige of professors in Japan, a factor that cannot be overrated in importance in a country such as Japan where personal interactions and social hierarchies are so critical.

## 4 Student Population and Instructional Program

As at the faculty level, the computer science student population is highly homogeneous when compared to the U.S. or many other countries. For one thing, it is overwhelmingingly male, especially at the graduate level. It is also mostly Japanese, with fewer foreign students than would be found in computer science programs in the U.S. Of the foreign students, most are from other Asian countries; it is very unusual (although not unheard of) to find Western students actually enrolled in a degree program, especially those leading to a graduate degree. There are, however, some signs pointing to change in these areas. Part of this is due to a general labor shortage and part to external pressure on the Japanese government to accept more students from less developed countries.

The graduate programs also have fewer students than in the U.S. This is especially true at the doctoral level, where a laboratory with two or three faculty may have roughly five students. For example, in the computer science department at one major national university, there are currently 25 doctoral students and six *kōza*, giving an average number per laboratory of slightly over four.

Several factors conspire to discourage students from entering graduate school. One is financial: there is no tradition or mechanism for awarding financial aid in the form of teaching or research assistantships as in the U.S. Although some fellowships are available from the governmental or private sources, students must generally take part-time jobs to finance their graduate education. Tuition at national universities is relatively low, however, with the current annual fee being 320,000 yen (about $2500).

Another factor is the aforementioned labor shortage. High-tech industries, as well as banks and insurance companies, are eager to hire students with Bachelors or Masters degrees, and often go to incredible lengths to do so during the annual student recruiting period. For those with Bachelors degrees, often hired as much for their personality and pedigree as for their specific academic background, companies will usually supply training that is roughly equivalent to a Masters degree. Such incentives combine with the financial disincentives of graduate school to siphon away potential students into industry. At the doctoral level, a final motivation is that the added salary does not come close to compensating for the lost years of earning during graduate school.

Although these appear to be the biggest reasons for the relatively small number of students, there are also a number of other factors. One, mentioned above, is the *Monbushō* guideline limiting the number of graduate students per faculty member. Another is simply the lack of physical space. Many universities are located in the most expensive urban areas, which makes it difficult for them to expand in place to any

significant degree. In fact, in the Tokyo area, *Monbush ō* rules prohibit new programs from being located on existing campuses due to the extremely high population density of the area. Some universities, such as Hiroshima University and Keio University, are addressing this issue by constructing new campuses outside of urban areas, but this is a time-consuming process that is expensive in its own right.

This lack of doctoral students in computer science could have serious long-term consequences, especially for Japanese universities. It is already evident that there is a significant shortage of faculty in computer science, and we repeatedly heard how difficult it is to recruit given the small doctoral production in Japan. This situation is exacerbated by competition from industry, which can offer positions that are more attractive in terms of equipment support, salary, and surroundings. Also a factor at national universities is personnel policies that mandate faculty retirement at a relatively early age (60-65 depending on the university). Interestingly, this policy actually works to the benefit of private universities and industry since many professors simply move into the private sector upon retiring from public institutions.

Most efforts to alleviate the current shortage appear to be driven by individuals rather than institutions, such as cases where professors arrange employment for students so they can stay in school. A more systematic example is the current move towards reducing the time it takes to earn degrees. The current nominal time to graduate is two years for an M.S. student and then three additional years for a doctoral student; rules have recently been changed at some universities to permit exceptional students to reduce this time by a year at each level, as well as reducing the time for an undergraduate degree from four years to three. Despite these steps, there is no evidence of a concerted effort to increase doctoral production by the Japanese government in any way analogous to that seen in the U.S. in the 1980's.

The instructional program in Japanese universities varies substantially from the U.S. model, especially at the undergraduate level. For example, a student takes more courses at a time than would be common in the U.S., which is feasible because classes usually have fewer outside obligations (e.g., homework) associated with it. Indeed, it is commonly accepted that Japanese students put far less effort into academic pursuits during their undergraduate years than U.S. students; this is due in large part to the "difficult entry, easy exit" characteristic of Japanese universities, which leads students to view the undergraduate years of college as a respite between the well-publicized rigors of high-school and corporate life. Also of interest is that, in keeping with the more formal and hierarchical nature of Japanese universities, lectures are less interactive than would be common in the U.S., with professors expounding on the topic with few if any questions or interruptions.

A Japanese undergraduate majoring in computer science becomes a formal member of a laboratory

beginning in the senior year. Students apply to join laboratories based on a tour of the laboratories in the department to which they have been admitted. If they continue on in graduate school, they will likely not only stay in the same university, but also in the same laboratory. If vacancies exist and the student is first-rate, they will as quickly as possible be appointed as a *joshu* in the laboratory (and then *jokyōju*, and *kyōju*). In a real sense, then, a student bound for academia makes a lifetime choice about a research topic (and style) in the senior year. The reward for this constraint is that the group, as led by the full professor, feels an unbreakable bond towards mentoring and taking care of each new student. The professor helps arrange jobs, gives advice, and often (literally) helps arrange suitable marriages. Academics in Japan frequently identify their laboratory as well as university and department when giving their personal background.

At the graduate level, normal classes are augmented by seminars that are organized within a given laboratory. Topics of current interest are addressed, with students being required to make presentations based on papers from the literature. Many of these papers are from standard international computer science journals, which has the added virtue of giving students practice reading English-language scientific papers. Occasionally, the seminars themselves are also conducted in English to give students practice in English conversation. In a similar vein, many computer science doctoral dissertations are written in English rather than Japanese, although M.S. theses are usually in Japanese. Unlike most U.S. graduate programs, there is no tradition of a breadth or qualifying exam. However, there are also requirements for publication before being awarded the doctoral degree; such publication commonly takes place in Japanese-language journals.

Computing equipment used in classes and for other educational purposes is similar to that found in U.S. universities. Unix workstations are popular, but there are also examples of DEC/VMS facilities, Convex mainframes, etc. X-terminals and Apple Macintoshes are also prevalent, although the inroads made by the latter in education seems somewhat less than in the U.S. due to their higher relative cost in Japan. The organization of facilities also seems similar to many places in the U.S., with some equipment operated by university-wide computer centers and other run by the departments specifically for their students and classes.

The fact that the equipment in Japanese universities is roughly comparable to that in the U.S is a significant change over 5 to 10 years ago. Much of this improvement can be attributed to the increasing popularity and decreasing price of higher-resolution equipment such as bitmapped monitors and laserwriters, which are more suitable for the intricacies of the Japanese written language. Although modified operating systems and other software are required to handle Japanese in such an environment, this represents a significant improvement over the era of standard glass CRTs where different hardware was required as well.

Money to purchase and maintain computing equipment for instructional purposes at national universities

is provided by *Monbush¯o*. A new influx of funds is provided for upgrading equipment about once every 10 years, which lags far enough behind the technology curve that most universities now choose to lease rather than purchase machines outright. Also, this is a case where the "leveling" effect caused by centralized control seems to have an impact: there seems to be less variation in the quality of computing equipment available for teaching among the different tiers of national universities than one would find in the U.S. One consequence of this leveling in equipment (as well as in the quantity and quality of space), especially when combined with the strong tendency of students to remain at their home institution throughout their entire life, is that potential students and faculty do not seriously consider equipment (and space) in making career decisions. The group is so important, and the full professor's advice is so compelling, that resources U.S. computer scientists consider as a primary factor in educational and employment decisions are at most tertiary factors to most Japanese computer scientists.

## 5 Research

As in the U.S., research is an important aspect of academic life in most Japanese universities. Graduate students in doctoral programs are expected to produce publishable research to receive a degree, and most faculty pursue research with a fervor similar to most of their American counterparts.

**Level of Activity and Quality.** Many signs point to the fact that Japanese research activity in computer science is significant. For example, there are a large number of professional organizations and associations in Japan related to computer science. These range from general societies like the Information Processing Society of Japan (IPSJ) and the Institute of Electronics, Information, and Communication Engineers (IEICE), to those with a more specialized mission like the Robotics Society of Japan (RSJ) and the Japan Society for Software Science and Technology (JSSST). In addition to sponsoring publications, these societies regularly hold technical meetings within Japan for their members. As an example, the IPSJ has approximately 20 SIGs (Special Interest Groups), each of which holds a one-day meeting about four times a year. At these meetings, recent research results are presented, with a proceedings containing (unrefereed) papers being subsequently produced and mailed to all SIG members. Both SIG and general meetings are more broadly attended in Japan than in the U.S., in part because it is expected and in part because the smaller size of Japan makes it more feasible than in the U.S.

The level of publication activity is also high, although this fact is not widely recognized outside of

Japan since many of the papers appear in outlets widely distributed only within that country. While most of these are in Japanese and are oriented towards the domestic community, at least four are targeted for a more international audience by being entirely in English. Moreover, even those in Japanese often have information such as titles, authors, and abstracts in English, which can serve as valuable research leads for non-Japanese speakers.

Despite being a potentially valuable source of information about Japanese research results, the availability of these journals in other countries is limited. As one example, consider the *Journal of Information Processing*, the English-language technical journal published by the IPSJ. As of 1989, only about 25 libraries in the U.S. subscribed to this journal, as compared to hundreds of libraries for comparable international journals. As one might expect, the problem is even more severe for Japanese-language technical journals. For example, as far as could be determined, the JSSST journal *Computer Software* is not received by even a single library in the U.S. Improving access to these types of journals within the U.S. and elsewhere seems imperative if scientists are to be able to use Japanese research results to further their own work.

Implicit in this discussion is the fact that, perhaps more than researchers in any other country, Japanese choose to publish in their own outlets *instead* of more international journals or conferences. While it is difficult to determine precisely the reasons for this, several factors seem to come into play. One is simply that it is easier: there is less competition for publication since the submitting community is smaller, plus language is less of a hurdle if the journal is in Japanese, or, if it is in English, if it is refereed by a non-native English speaker. Related, but perhaps even more important, is the fact that there is little in the reward structure of Japanese researchers to encourage them to choose international over domestic outlets. For example, as noted above, Japanese professors have tenure upon beginning their careers and compensation is based on length of service rather than performance. Moreover, given the greater relative importance of personal relationships in Japan, choosing a domestic outlet is advantageous since it strengthens ties with others in the field. This is especially important given that the professional societies are in many ways the computer science power structure in Japan.

All these factors mean that the community of Japanese researchers who actively and consistently participate in international conferences and especially journals is relatively small. They are a self-selected group who tend to be more "internationalized" (to use a currently popular Japanese phrase) than the others, and who are willing to make the extra effort necessary to compete in this more competitive arena. Moreover, this effort is usually an *additional* burden since most of these individuals also feel it necessary to be active domestically as well to maintain appropriate professional standing within Japan. Thus, the net result is that

outside researchers often lack the big picture about computer science in Japan since they tend to see only a small fraction of the results actually generated.

Comparing the quality of computer science research done in Japan versus that in the U.S. is a much trickier and subjective issue. Our own opinion is that, on the whole, computer science is probably stronger in the U.S., but that much of the work underway in Japan is better than many people realize or appreciate. For example, we saw credible efforts underway in such diverse areas as object-oriented systems, document recognition, software engineering, and complexity theory. However, making direct comparisons is a complex matter. One reason is simply the difference in organizational structure between U.S. and Japanese departments; that is, considering a U.S. department of perhaps 30 faculty, plus staff and students, against a Japanese laboratory of about three, plus students, is difficult at best. Additionally, one must also be aware when making any comparison of the fact that the size of Japan's research community as a whole is much smaller than the U.S., especially within the university system; this means, among other things, that the amount of research one would expect to see is proportionally less. In any case, it is our belief that in most areas, the problems being addressed and the solutions being pursued do not differ significantly between the two countries.

**Facilities.** General-purpose computing facilities devoted to research in Japan are very similar to what one would find in many U.S. universities. For example, use of Sun workstations and X-terminals is widespread; a line of Unix workstations from Sony called NewsStations are also very popular, both because they are generally cheaper than Suns and also because they include hardware support for written Japanese. Various other machines are seen, although less frequently; these include Macintoshes, NeXTs, DECStations, etc. However, although the amount of general-purpose computing equipment is generally adequate, it still seems to be a notch below that available in many top U.S. computer science departments. This is especially true for those that have received significant external support in the form of DARPA contracts or NSF CER/Institutional Infrastructure grants.

A bigger difference in computing facilities at the current time seems to be in the area of more special-purpose equipment, such as commercial parallel machines or high-end graphics engines. For example, we are aware of only a few hypercube-type machines at universities in Japan. This shortage seems to stem from several factors, including the lack of financial resources needed to purchase this type of equipment in individual laboratories and the relative slowness of universities' central computing facilities to move into these areas. Although we would expect these differences to diminish somewhat in the coming years as the prices of these machines drop, the structure by which Japanese university researchers acquire equipment is

unlikely to change quickly.

Network connectivity between sites in Japan, and between Japan and the U.S. has improved greatly in the past decade. JUNET (Japan Unix Network), the main research network within Japan, has been in existence for eight years and now provides sufficient connectivity to link most researchers with electronic mail and sometimes telnet-style service. WIDE (Wide Area Distributed Environment) is another network project started in 1987. In addition to providing a backbone network within Japan, WIDE is an exceptionally valuable part of the infrastructure for collaborating Japanese and U.S. researchers, since its connection to the Internet via Hawaii has substantially improved the quality of cross-Pacific networking. We found that electronic mail to and from the U.S. was generally all-but-instantaneous; running talk and remote login programs rarely showed abnormal delays.

Although computing and networking are pretty much on par with the U.S., in other support areas, the situation in Japanese universities is generally worse. Perhaps the two most crucial elements have been mentioned earlier: space and staff personnel. With space, the biggest problem is quantity, although the quality is also generally below what one would find in the U.S. Lack of technical support staff to manage computer hardware and software is also a serious problem; many of the functions that U.S. university researchers take for granted are performed in Japan by professors or students. Given this lack of professional attention, computing facilities tend to be more disorganized and *ad hoc* than in most U.S. departments. For example, backups are done less systematically in many Japanese laboratories than one might expect in comparable computing facilities in the U.S.

**Funding.** *Monbush* $\bar{o}$ is the major source of research money in national universities. This support comes in two forms: base funding and grants. Base funding, as the name implies, is money given to each laboratory to provide a common support foundation for research. The actual amount is based on the number of faculty and students, and is essentially uniform across all public universities and all disciplines.

*Monbush* $\bar{o}$ has a number of grant programs, where proposals are submitted by individuals or groups of faculty and selected on merit by a review panel. In 1990 across all disciplines, *Monbush* $\bar{o}$'s total research grant budget was 55.8 billion yen, roughly $445 million. For the standard program, proposals can be on any topic. In addition, there is a program for directed research in which proposals are solicited on specific, although widely-drawn, topics. There are usually a large number of targeted areas at any one time across all of science and engineering (perhaps 60-80), with about three to five being related in some way to computer science. For example, at the current time, there are five, on such topics as decentralized and autonomous

systems, highly parallel systems, and concept development and knowledge acquisition. In both programs, there are multiple tiers based on the maximum size of the grant; the higher tiers with larger amounts of money are generally used to fund projects involving multiple faculty and potentially multiple institutions. Grants run for three years, and are used for equipment, supplies, travel, etc., but not for faculty salaries (since 12-month contracts are standard) or, as mentioned earlier, to pay graduate students. The concept of additional funds that go to the institution for overhead costs as found in the U.S. is also absent from the Japanese system.

Another source of funds is the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), well-known outside of Japan as the sponsor of such large projects as the Fifth Generation Project and Sigma. Perhaps less appreciated is the fact that relatively little of this money goes to academic researchers, since the primary purpose of MITI's projects is to enhance the industrial sector. What money does flow towards universities is very much tied to a specific project and involves cooperating with industrial partners.

Financial support from companies is another source of research funds. In 1990, research contracts and grants totaled 42.6 billion yen (about $340 million). Although this is a significant figure, it may be less than expected given the relative wealth of Japanese companies. Indeed, it is often observed that Japanese industry has stronger ties with top U.S. computer science departments than with the top Japanese laboratories.[2]

Donations from industry to universities in Japan can take any one of several forms. One common practice is for companies to give money as a "gift" to the professor to ensure access to graduating students in his laboratory. The amounts here are relatively small, on the order of 500,000 yen (about $4000), and can be viewed as somewhat analogous to the industrial affiliates programs found in many U.S. computer science departments. Often this money is used for foreign travel, for which the use of *Monbush$\bar{o}$* base funding is explicitly forbidden. Companies with specific goals in mind may also provide money to professors in exchange for performing part or all of a particular project, usually as a contract rather than a grant. Finally, companies sometimes donate funds to sponsor "gift laboratories" at selected universities. These are often used to financially support foreign visitors on a rotating basis.

## 6 Conclusions

As promised, our discussion of academic computer science in Japan is anecdotal and incomplete. We do believe, however, that it accurately relates our impressions based on sabbatical stays and several return visits.

[2] One Japanese view of this situation can be found in [Ich92].

We also find that these impressions are consistent with other colleagues who have visited Japan from time to time.

Probably the most important lesson we have drawn from our experiences is that it is difficult to overestimate the influence of culture in distinguishing the structure of American and Japanese approaches to teaching and research in computer science. In both Japan and the U.S., the style of teaching and research, the career paths that are taken, the available facilities, and even the topics that are taught and investigated are affected by the culture.

Among the more noticeable differences we observed are:

- The tendency of Japanese faculty to stay in a department, or even a laboratory, from the last year of undergraduate study through retirement differs from the more mobile approach in the U.S.
- The narrow focus of most Japanese computer science research programs, which is balanced at least in part by their greater willingness to accept and use outside ideas, contrasts with generally broader research programs in the U.S.
- The structural leveling of resources in general—computing equipment, laboratory space, and staff support in particular—contrasts with the wide variation across departments in the U.S.
- The marked absence of women and foreigners in the faculty and graduate students ranks contrasts with the more heterogeneous nature of departments in the U.S.
- The small number of faculty and doctoral students in top-tier Japanese programs contrasts with the much larger programs found in comparable U.S. universities.

These differences, even when taken together with others in the paper, still do not adequately capture the "feel" of academic computer science in Japan. The influence of Japan on computer science, as in other political, social, and scientific realms, is growing. It is essential for individuals to educate themselves about Japanese computer science in order to benefit from the work that goes on there and to understand how to improve our own efforts.

**Acknowledgments.** R. Bryant, M. Halldorsson, D. Kahaner, Y. Kambayashi, T. Katayama, J. Modenda, Y. Tohma, C. Tuttle, and the anonymous referees all made comments that helped improve the final version. T. Katayama, Y. Tohma, K. Torii, The University of Arizona, the University of Washington, Tokyo Institute of Technology, Osaka University, Toshiba, and SRA provided invaluable support that made possible our visits to Japan. This work was also supported by the National Science Foundation under grants INT-8910818, CCR-8858804, and CCR-9003161.

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## Sidebars

**Background.** The observations in this paper are based primarily on sabbaticals that the authors took in Japan. Starting in June 1990, David Notkin spent three months at Tokyo Institute of Technology, followed by nine months at Osaka University. During that period, he conducted joint research with Japanese colleagues, gave lectures, participated in seminars, etc. He also visited a number of other Japanese universities, as well as such companies as Fujitsu, Hitachi, IBM, Mitsubishi, NTT, NEC, Sony, Software Research Associates (SRA), and Toshiba. Funding came in part from sabbatical pay from the University of Washington and in part from endowed positions held at the two Japanese universities; these positions were funded by Toshiba Corporation and SRA, respectively. Richard Schlichting's sabbatical was spent at Tokyo Institute of Technology from December 1989 through July 1990. Like Notkin, Schlichting participated in the ongoing professional life of the university, in his case by conducting joint research, teaching a short undergraduate course in distributed systems, and participating in seminars. He also traveled extensively throughout Japan, visiting approximately 20 companies and universities, ranging from Hokkaido University in the north to Kyushu University in the south; trip reports from many of these visits can be found in [Sch91]. His salary came through the normal sabbatical program at The University of Arizona, with funding for travel and living expenses provided by a grant from the U.S. National Science Foundation.

[Schl91] R. D. Schlichting. Sabbatical in Japan: Collected trip reports. Technical Report TR 91-22, Dept. of Comp. Sci., Univ. of Arizona, 1991.

**A USENET Newsgroup.** To partially address the problem of accessing Japanese technical information, an electronic forum called comp.research.japan has recently been established. This forum is part of USENET, an informal worldwide computer network in which messages are posted in "newsgroups" based on subject area. The penetration of USENET in the technological community is substantial; the most credible estimate is that there are currently about 39,000 sites and 1.7 million individuals who read at least one of the approximately 1500 newsgroups. Also, unlike most databases or bulletin-board systems that often require significant initiative to access, with USENET the articles come directly to the user, making it easier to attract casual and intermittent readers.

The newsgroup comp.research.japan is intended to act as a conduit for informing people about work underway in Japan. Articles of the following types are most common:

- Descriptions of current Japanese computing and computer science activities, including reports written by Dr. David Kahaner under the auspices of the U.S. Office of Naval Research-Asia.
- Trip reports to Japanese universities, government laboratories, and companies.
- Information about computer science research papers published in Japan, including titles, authors, and (where feasible) abstracts.
- Pointers to other sources of Japanese technical information, such as the free search services provided by NSF to Japan's National Center for Science Information Systems (NACSIS) on-line databases.
- Announcements related to computing and computer science in Japan, including those related to conferences held in Japan, research opportunities in Japan, etc.
- Queries related to computing and computer science in Japan.

Since being founded in December 1990, approximately 450 articles have been posted to the newsgroup. Most originate with the readers, but others, such as information derived from the Table of Contents of Japanese journals, are generated at The University of Arizona under a grant from the Office of Naval Research. Articles of particular or continuing interest are also made available for anonymous FTP (file transfer protocol) from The University of Arizona to allow later retrieval from readers on the Internet. Current estimates put the worldwide readership of comp.research.japan at 28,000.

For further information, contact Prof. Richard D. Schlichting.

**Japanese Journals and Professional Organizations.** The following are some of the journals sponsored by professional organizations in Japan.[3] More details, such as ordering information, can be found in [JS91].

*Journal of Information Processing* (English), IPSJ
*Transactions of the IPSJ*, IPSJ
*Journal of the IPSJ*, IPSJ
*IPSJ Technical Report* (some articles in English), IPSJ (series)
*Transactions on Communications, Electronics, Information, and Systems* (English), IEICE
*Transactions of the IEICE*, IEICE (series of 7 separate transactions)
*Journal of the IEICE*, IEICE
*IEICE Technical Report* (some articles in English), IEICE (series)
*Advances in Software Science and Technology* (English), JSSST
*Computer Software*, JSSST
*Denshi Tokyo* (English), IEEE Tokyo Section

[3] This list compiled jointly with Raymond Jacoby, Tokyo Institute of Technology.

*Journal of Information Processing and Management*, JICST
*Transactions of the ISICE*, ISICE
*Journal of the RSJ*, RSJ
*Transactions of the IEEJ*, IEEJ
*Journal of the IEEJ*, IEEJ
*Journal of the JSAI*, JSAI

The professional organizations mentioned above are the following.

Information Processing Society of Japan (IPSJ)
Japan Society for Software Science and Technology (JSSST)
Institute of Electronics, Information, and Communication Engineers (IEICE)
Japan Information Center of Science and Technology (JICST)
Institute of Systems, Control, and Information Engineers (ISICE)
Robotics Society of Japan (RSJ)
Institute of Electrical Engineers of Japan (IEEJ)
Japanese Society for Artificial Intelligence (JSAI)

[JS91] R. Jacoby and R. D. Schlichting. A listing of Japanese periodical publications in computer science. Technical Report TR 91-7, Dept. of Comp. Sci., Univ. of Arizona, 1991.